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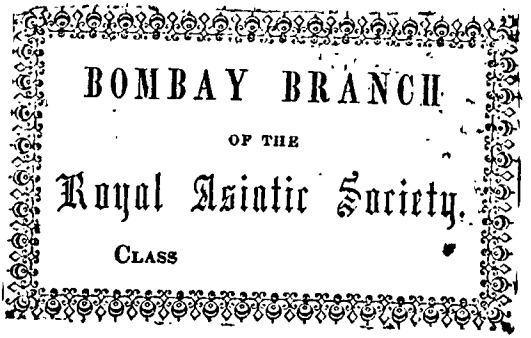
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THE CHURCH OF THE FIRST DAYS.

THE CHURCH OF THE FIRST DAYS:

LECTURES ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

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BY

C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.
VICAR OF DONCASTER.

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LECTURE I.

THE ANONYMOUS ALTAR.

ACTS XVII. 23.

To THE UNKNOWN GOD.

A GOSPEL should be a word for all men. It is one test of a real Gospel, that it can overleap all barriers placed between man and man by age and condition, by race and circumstance, by character and education, and find its way into that innermost kernel and heart's core of nature which *makes the whole world kin.*

It is so, we believe—it is so, we have proof—with our Gospel. Already in this one Book we have seen it dealing with the Jew, and we have seen it dealing with the Gentile: we have seen it in Palestine, and we have seen it in Asia Minor: we have seen it in Asia, and

we have seen it in Europe: we have seen it at Antioch, we have seen it in Cyprus, we have seen it at Lystra, we have seen it at Philippi, we have seen it at Thessalonica, we have seen it at Berea: everywhere it has found some hearts into which it entered as a healing balm, some lives which it was able to penetrate with transforming power. And tonight we are to see it at ATHENS.

We must not stay to describe St Paul's progress toward that city. Though the people of Berea were, in general *more honourable* than those of Thessalonica in their first treatment of the Gospel; not condemning it unheard, but searching the Old Testament Scriptures to see *whether those things were so;* yet they did not all believe: there were many unconvinced—it always is so—by Gospel evidences; and these unimpressed or undecided hearers were open to the evil influences of more designing and malignant men. Jews from Thessalonica followed in the track of the Apostle, and stirred up the same excitement at Berea which had already driven him from amongst themselves.

Such was the immediate cause of that visit to Athens which brought St Paul for

once into direct contact and conflict with the most refined and enlightened forms of Greek civilization. Leaving his companions Silas and Timotheus to complete his work at Berea, he had been escorted by some new friends, the firstfruits of his ministry there, to that great and far-famed city which has left an indelible impress upon the arts and upon the literature and upon the philosophy of the world.

He was left there, for a time, alone. The Bereans who had accompanied him were gone, and Silas and Timotheus were not yet come. The Epistle to the Thessalonians tells us that he had longer to wait for them than the history seems to say. He *thought it good to be left at Athens alone*, while Timotheus went back to see how it fared with the Thessalonian congregation. At all events, he was now alone in Athens. Some of us know that sinking of the spirits which is occasioned by loneliness in a strange city. They have felt what it is to be cut off from every loved and familiar face, and to be compelled to move through crowded streets with a desolateness only aggravated by numbers. They can understand something—but I fear they can scarcely understand all—of that which St Paul felt in his lonely sojourn in

Athens. St Paul was a man of quick feeling, of lively emotion, and of the gentlest affection: in these things he was not only one of us, he was far before us all. But even these were not the causes of his chief distress during this stay in Athens. St Paul's life was given to one work, and his whole heart was in it. Many a Christian man—such as we now call Christians—has tarried in a superstitious or idolatrous place, and seen nothing in it but the antiquity of its associations or the curiosity of its monuments. But wherever St Paul was, there was his entire devotion, his earnest faith, his burning zeal, his self-forgetting love. At Athens, where the traveller feels nothing but a thrill of historic and poetic interest; where it would be judged by many a mere narrowmindedness to remember the Gospel, and a mere loss of time to be communing with Christ; St Paul was just what he was everywhere: not unmoved, it may be, by recollections of an heroic patriotism, or by sights and scenes of indestructible beauty; but a man of God, a servant of Christ, still: he could not dissever the magnificence of a temple or the perfection of a statue from the remembrance of the idolatry which it served and of the souls which it

debased: and so it is written, that, *while Paul waited for his friends at Athens, his spirit was stirred* (*provoked* or *irritated*) *within him as he beheld how the city was idol-ridden,* filled and occupied by idols.

St Paul's irritation was not, as is too often the case with us, a merely vexing and annoying thing, torturing to himself and to all about him: on the contrary, it stirred him to action; it set him considering what he could do to remedy (in whole or in part) the evil which he deplored. At Athens, as elsewhere, there was a Jewish synagogue: there at all events he might find some to sympathize with his horror at idolatry; there too he might at least argue from the common ground of Scripture, and assume both the unity of the Godhead and the expectation of a Christ. *He conversed,* or *reasoned, in the synagogue with the Jews and with the devout persons;* that is, as before, with the proselytes to Judaism. How successfully, we know not: topics of still greater interest demand our attention. The Jews he had with him always: the Athenians he met but for once: this was their day, the season of their visitation.

Accordingly we read that *in the market-*

place also—the far-famed Agora of Athens, with its marvellous works of art and records of greatness—*he conversed,* or *reasoned, daily with those who met with him.* St Paul was not too proud, or too reserved, or too indolent, or too half-hearted, to seize opportunities of conversing with strangers. He felt that no man was a stranger to him: a man with a soul to be saved or lost must have, for him, a ground of interest and a point of contact. Thus the next verse tells us that in these daily conversations there encountered him some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, who had in Athens the birthplace and the capital of their several schools of science. The Epicureans were the Atheists, and the Stoics the Pantheists of antiquity; the one dreaming of a world made by chance, the other of a world containing the Deity: the one bidding man to *eat and drink because tomorrow he dies,* the other, to wrap himself in his virtue and to count it the height of human attainment not to feel. Strange collision, that of these philosophies with the Gospel! Strange meeting, between a man who lived but for duty, yet found that duty in love divine and human, and those who either denied the existence of a duty, or

else made duty another name for hardness! We can imagine—the discourse which follows will help us to do so—the sort of converse between these philosophers and the Apostle: how he would avail himself of any shred and fragment of the truth in the creed of each, and show exactly where it lost itself in error: how he would urge alike upon each the reality of a personal God in direct relation to a personal man; of a God to whom man's state is not indifferent, and a man who must give account of himself to God: how he would do battle, on grounds even of a natural religion, alike with the pride of the Stoic and with the pleasure-worship of the Epicurean; to the one exposing man's weakness, to the other presenting God's law: how he would lay the one low before God, and seek to lift the other from the earth on which he was grovelling.

Very brief, yet withal very graphic, is the account here given of the treatment of the Gospel by the Athenian philosophers. *Some said, What would this babbler say?* What is that which this mere picker-up and retailer of nothings would express to us if he could? No language could be more contemptuous. It represents the Apostle as a mere reporter of idle

tales picked up from others, and as a man incapable even of expressing the follies which he has adopted. Others took a more serious view of the case. *He seems to be an announcer of foreign divinities;* a sort of travelling missionary of false gods, desiring to add new names to an already crowded and overflowing Pantheon. Whence this idea? *Because,* St Luke adds, *he brought them the glad tidings of Jesus and the Resurrection.* The names of Jesus and the Resurrection occurred so frequently in his conversations, that they, interpreting him by themselves, ran to the conclusion that they were the names of two deities whom he sought to incorporate in the national religion. And if this were so, it was a case requiring the cognizance of the great religious court of Athens; that ancient and august tribunal which was named from holding its sessions on the Areopagus, or hill of Mars. *They took hold of him and led him to the Areopagus; saying, Can we know,* art thou able to inform us, *what this new doctrine which is spoken by thee is? for thou introducest some strange things to our ears: we wish then to know what these things would be;* what may be the meaning and import of these things. A brief word of comment on the

Athenian character is here introduced by the narrator. *All Athenians and the resident foreigners had leisure for nothing else than to tell or to hear anything at all new.* It was the complaint of their own orators. When they ought to have been taking vigorous measures for the welfare or protection of their own state, still the love of news predominated over every other principle, and they who should have been acting were ever talking still! There are some in every congregation to whom this reproof belongs: they spend their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. What will these do when the light of eternity rises upon them? when the world's news will have died out with the world, and nothing, nothing survives for them but a soul lost if not saved?

Thus then St Paul stood before that famous court, of which the poets and orators of Greece tell such proud things. It does not appear to have been a formal trial. It does not seem that life or death hung upon the issue. Rather we may think of it as of a preliminary proceeding, designed to settle the necessity of a criminal prosecution. Something might be founded upon it: but for the present it was a

hearing only for information; only to clear up suspicions, or else to darken and fix them. Observe now the wisdom and the courage with which he spake. Never more truly were the words verified, *I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.*

Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. Another and perhaps truer rendering of the words is this, *I observe that in all things ye are more religious* than others. It is a question which can never be decided, which of these two was really the Apostle's meaning. The word itself has both senses; *religious,* and *superstitious.* It seems to be more in St Paul's manner, to start from a point of agreement than from a point of variance with his hearers. He would carry them with him if he could. And he selects this one characteristic as in itself hopeful. They have evidently had a sense, and a strong sense, of a superior power. They have filled their city with recognitions and mementos of a hand above them. It is better—may we not say it? that a man should feel his dependence, and that a man should seek to be in communication with One above him, than that he should

do neither. That religious instinct, if it can only be rightly guided, is far better than an utter insubordination and insolence of self-trust. Thus St Paul opens his discourse with one word of limited praise. *I observe that you are a religious race.*

For in passing through and reviewing your objects of reverence, I found also an altar on which was inscribed, To AN UNKNOWN GOD. Lest after all their care, after all the multiplication of their altars and temples, any one superior being should at last have been overlooked; lest there should remain in heaven or earth or sea one deity unnamed and unhonoured in the devotions of the nation; they had adopted the singular expedient of an anonymous altar, which might at least deprecate the vengeance of a disregarded and slighted God. This altar St Paul, with a wisdom and a skill above man's, takes as the text of his Sermon.

That then, that thing, that Divinity, *which ye in ignorance reverence, this I announce to you.* I am come, he says, to give a name to that anonymous altar. I am come to you from an unknown God, to enable you to fill up that blank space in your devotions. And who then is He? Is He indeed one and but one among

many objects of worship? Will one altar suffice Him, one among many, so that He shall be merely added to the *gods many and lords many*, whom a heathen world worships? Listen to the sublime answer to that enquiry.

The God who made the world and all things that are in it, He being already, being originally and by the right of creation, *Lord of heaven and earth*, Sovereign and supreme Possessor of heaven and earth, as having Himself brought them into being, *dwelleth not in temples made with hands; nor by human hands is served* (*ministered to*) *as needing anything more* than is His by virtue of universal ownership, *Himself giving* continually *to all life and breath and all things; and made of one blood every nation of men to dwell upon every face of the earth*, upon the earth in all its aspects, north and south and east and west; *having defined*, marked out as by exact limits, *assigned seasons* of national and individual existence, *and the limitations of their habitation.*

One God made the world. He is the Owner of the universe: how can He be limited to one spot in it? He is the Giver and Preserver of human life: how can He require material offerings, as though to support His own? He

is the One Creator of all races: there is not one God of this nation and another of that: to each race He assigns the time and duration of its being, and the exact place of its habitation: and with what object? Why does He thus regulate man's being? Why does He thus keep a sovereign hand over all circumstances of human existence? What would He have men do, as the result of this Divine reign? The 27th verse gives the answer.

To seek God; if perhaps they might feel after Him, as men grope in the dark after some lost object, *and* not only feel after Him, but *find Him* too; *even though indeed He is already,* is from the first, is before they seek Him, *not far from each one of us: for in Him we live and move and exist;* it is in Him, it is in virtue of His all-including and all-embracing presence, that we exercise any power of life or motion, or possess indeed any being: *as some also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring.* He quotes from a Greek poet of Tarsus in Cilicia, his own native city; as though claiming for himself a new link of connection with his audience, and exercising a sort of fellow-citizenship with Greece, as before (and subsequently too) with Rome.

Being then already, being by origin, *an offspring of God, we ought not,* even for our own sakes, *to think that the Godhead is like unto gold or silver or stone, gravure of art and device of man.* If we ourselves are, as your own poets say, God's offspring, it is derogatory even to man's nature to represent God under material and inanimate forms. Let the very dignity of man cry out against the disparagement of God.

The times then of ignorance God having overlooked, now charges all men (mankind) everywhere to repent; inasmuch as He set a day, once for all appointed in His secret counsels, and now announced even to us, *in which He is about to judge the world in righteousness, in* the person of *a Man whom He marked out, having afforded a pledge to all by raising Him from among the dead.* There was a time, a long and dreary age, during which God seemed as it were to acquiesce in the spiritual ignorance of His creatures. He interposed not by any act of authority to cut short the season of their blindness. But now He has interposed. Now He sends through the world a call to repentance. And that call is backed by a threatening as well as a promise. There is a day of judgment. It is a fixed day, though

we know it not. And that judgment will be a righteous judgment. All sin will quail before it. And that judgment will be conducted by a Man; even by One who is as truly Man as He is truly God. And the proof of His investment with the office of the Judge, is the fact of His own resurrection already accomplished.

Well can we understand that there was that in this address which was at once trifling and shocking in Grecian ears. *When they heard of a resurrection of dead men, some mocked. What?* they might say, even the more thoughtful, *give us back a body when we are at last released from it? Give us back the body which has clogged the pure soul, and dragged downwards the heavenly aspirations, and infected with the very leprosy of sin a nature that was akin to God's? Nay, let us hope better things than these! Tell us of a conquest of the body, tell us of a deliverance from the body, and we will listen: but not of a restoration of the body from the dust of death; not of an impossibility, and not of an injury and a torment.* Others listened with a deeper attention, and said when he concluded, *We will hear thee, again also, concerning this.*

And thus, for this time, he departed from

among them: he quitted the place of hearing, and mingled again as before, we doubt not, with the various groups which loitered in the gathering-places of the city.

Not in vain had he spoken even this once. One man, himself a member of the court of Areopagus, was a convert to the word spoken: the judge was judged, and the accused conquered. He and others also *clave to* the Apostle, *and believed.* They were not ashamed to be in his company, even in those high places of learning and of arrogance. And not in vain certainly had St Paul spoken for all time, leaving on record for ever a glorious example of a Gospel to the heathen. Well had it been, my brethren, if the same wisdom had ever taught in the world's dark places; if a like recognition had always been made, of a Divine witness in man, a Divine seed and spark of light, waiting only the hand of Revelation to kindle it into a pure and steady flame; if, instead of trampling upon man as he is, or flinging headlong before him that *pearl of great price* of which he knows not yet the value, Christian teachers had begun by drawing from within that latent instinct, and stirring into activity that dormant conscience, by which man, however debased, how-

ever degraded, does to the end differ from the beasts that perish!

There is, my brethren, in every heart an altar with this inscription, *To the unknown God.* It is there, if there be nothing better, in you. You know that your conscience witnesses in you of God, and you know that your heart does at times cry out for Him. You know that there is no rest out of Him, and you desire, in the end if not now, to find rest in Him. My brethren, I would help you to replace that anonymous inscription by one which Revelation has given you. I would have you know Him whom as yet you know not. Know Him first as the Author and Sustainer of being, as the Assigner of your place and of your time, as around you and with you everywhere, as so near to you, in His own holy presence, that in Him you actually *live and move and have your being.* Feel after Him even thus: send forth after Him the cry of your voice and the hand of your soul, and be assured that He is always more ready to hear than you to pray. But stop not with the God of Nature: go on to think of Him as the God of judgment, and go on to think of Him as the God and Father of that Saviour who is to be the Judge. Seek Him

through Jesus Christ; and be well assured that He who is near to you as the God of your life is nearer still to you as the God of your soul and as the God of your salvation.

The times of ignorance God no longer winks at: the Sun of righteousness has risen upon us, and whosoever will may have in Him the light of life. *We beseech you* in His name *that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.*

LECTURE II.

CHRIST'S SECRET ONES.

ACTS XVIII. 10.

I have much people in this city.

THE *city* here spoken of was Corinth. We have read of the Gospel at Athens: tonight we are to hear of it at Corinth. The two places were not many miles distant: but they were very different. Athens was the seat of learning: Corinth was the centre of business, of commerce, and of government. Athens was a city of loungers; a place of indolent curiosity and of leisurely speculation. Corinth was a city of men of business, a meeting-place of nations: its two ports fronted the one towards Asia, the other towards Europe; and it was as if the two worlds met there and trafficked.

Corinth was also a city of great luxury and of notorious vice. *To play the Corinthian* was a proverbial expression for being a man of pleasure, addicted to dissipation and debauchery.

These few strokes may suffice to set Corinth before us sufficiently for the present purpose. Such was the change involved in those first words of the chapter, *After these things Paul departed from Athens and came to Corinth.*

My brethren, the Gospel is for all nations, and of none. It is equally suitable and equally unsuitable to all sorts and conditions of men. It would be hard to say which natural disposition most dislikes it; the pride of philosophy, the worldliness of business, or the frivolity of pleasure. And yet for each one of these it has a message, and to each one of these it has a mission. Each one wants it; each one is unconsciously athirst for it; and to each one it conveys that gracious call which is the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ to the nations, *If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.* Blessed be God, everywhere some listen, even if everywhere more refuse!

We will first briefly recount the few marked incidents of this first stay at Corinth.

St Paul arrived there alone. Silas and Timotheus, left at Berea, had not yet (it appears) rejoined him. We know how this was. Though at first he had sent word to them *to come to him with all speed*, yet on reflection he had desired one at least of the two to revisit Thessalonica before he did so. He *thought it good to be left at Athens alone*, and sent Timotheus back to the Thessalonians to *establish them and to comfort them concerning their faith*. Some suppose that Timotheus had actually rejoined him, and was sent back to Thessalonica from Athens: others, and perhaps more correctly, that it was by a message sent from Athens that he was instructed thus to proceed.

The result was the same. St Paul was again a stranger in a strange city. What Christian companionship was to him, and what the desolateness of Christian isolation, we know well from his writings: our Lord Himself sent His disciples not one by one, but *two and two, before His face*, and even divine faith needs for its fullest enjoyment the interchange of human love.

The Providence of God, ever caring for those that are cast down, found for him a new friend. An edict of the Emperor Claudius had banished all Jews from Rome. This iniquitous act was overruled for good in at least one instance. A Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, but resident (for purposes of business) in Rome, had arrived at Corinth with his wife Priscilla, and was there engaged in the business of tent-making; preparing, that is, tents for travellers in the East, out of that coarse cloth of goats' hair, for which St Paul's own country, Cilicia, was famous. Now St Paul himself, according to the wise and pious custom of his age and country, had been taught this trade. He was a learned man, brought up under the best and most celebrated of masters, and certainly (we must conclude) of no indigent family: yet he had been taught a trade: the reverses of life are many; the accidents of foreign travel, in those days as in these, manifold and diverse; and it was thought no disparagement to the social position of a young Israelite, to be acquainted with a manual trade, and thus enabled to support himself, if need were, by the labour of his own hands. What a blessing it is, my friends—

let me say, my young friends, more especially —to have an honest calling! No wise man will teach you to be ashamed of being able, if it be necessary, to support yourselves. O the misery which grows in this world out of idleness! out of compulsory idleness oftentimes! A man would work, and cannot get work to do! See that this misery be not your own fault; the result of a foolish pride, refusing to learn a business! If it come in the way of Providence, it must be borne, like other trials: but indeed, I believe, it is one of the hardest and most disconsolate of all.

St Paul entered this populous and busy city: and what could he have done, if he had not been able to support himself? There were in those days no "livings" as we call them: an Apostle had no maintenance but what he worked for: and how could he have hoped to gain acceptance for his Gospel in a strange and unbelieving city, if he had had to begin by asking men to feed and clothe and lodge him? if he had had to begin by asserting his claim to a free subsistence, and thus by disparaging the disinterestedness of his own motives? He must be an honest man before he could be a religious man: he

must be able to supply his own wants, before he could preach to other men of the necessities of their souls. Therefore he took up his abode with Aquila, and worked with his own hands at the trade of tent-making.

And yet no one, my brethren, has more strongly asserted than St Paul, the right of a Christian minister to *live of the Gospel.* Every thing in its own place and time. In a nation already calling itself Christian, and recognizing therefore the work and the position of a Christian ministry, it is right that men should be set free from manual labour for a higher and (let me say) a far more responsible and a far more difficult and arduous service. But St Paul himself, labouring for Christ in a world still rejecting and blaspheming Him, would not *use these things,* lest any should say that he was idle, or lest any should say that he was mercenary. *He abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tent-makers.*

On the Sabbath all work was laid aside: and on that sacred day, week by week, amidst the scoffs and jeers of a heathen populace surrounding them, the Jews of Corinth, as the Jews wherever scattered, entered the

place of worship, to read the Law and the Prophets, and to address their worship to the God of Israel. Thither St Paul too bent his steps; and there he *reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded* (*sought to persuade*) *the Jews, and the Gentiles* who worshipped with them.

At last Silas and Timotheus arrived from Macedonia. Till now St Paul had been heavy in heart on account of those beloved congregations which he had left behind him there in an enemy's land. How heavy in heart we know from himself; from his 1st Epistle to the Thessalonians. And how much relieved and lightened in heart now, we know also from himself; from the same Epistle. A weight was taken off from his spirit which few of us have ever felt; that weight which rests upon the soul of a Christian while he *stands in doubt* of some one whose salvation is dear to him as his own. Now therefore we read that *Paul was pressed in the spirit,* or (according to another reading) *pressed by the word:* his zeal was a positive pain to him: it was as though he felt the word of God within constraining and compelling him to give it utterance: exactly according to those well-known

expressions of righteous men and prophets of old, *I am full of words; the spirit within me constraineth me:* and again, *I am pained at my very heart, I cannot hold my peace: His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.* The relief of his anxiety about the Macedonian churches left him free to give all his thought to the wicked and idolatrous people around him. He was *straitened* in himself, he was actually pained and coerced, by that zeal to preach Christ which could no longer be held in.

When he found that the Jews as a body were obstinately set against the truth, he followed his Master's rule, and, with a sign expressive of a deep sense of their danger, turned from them to the Gentiles. He had done what he could: life was short, eternity at hand: his work must be done, his commission must be discharged: they who will not *hear* must at last be left to *forbear.* He selected a new place of meeting. There was a proselyte named Justus, himself now a convert to the Gospel, whose house was contiguous to the synagogue. Thither St Paul transferred his conferences with such as would

listen. And now a great work began. Crispus, the ruler (or one of the rulers) of the Jewish synagogue, now became a convert. A great effort it must have cost him; but it was made: he too joined the little company in the house of Justus; and we learn from the 1st chapter of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians that he was one of two or three persons whom St Paul baptized at Corinth with his own hands. *Many* now *of the Corinthians heard, believed, and were baptized.* It is often so. The coldest hour is the last before the dawn: just when all is opposition, obloquy, and indifference, a new impulse is given, we know not from whence—and yet we do know—and a great interest is awakened where before all was torpor, darkness and death.

And St Paul was not left in any doubt as to the presence of a higher help than man's. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself spoke to him in a night-vision, and said, *Be not afraid, but speak on, and be not silent: because I am with thee, and no one shall set on thee to hurt thee, because I have much people in this city.* Thus cheered and emboldened, *he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.*

The appointment of a new Roman Governor,

Gallio by name, was the signal for a more decisive outbreak. Gallio is one of those men whose character we can read by two lights; the light of man, and the light of God. He was brother to a famous Roman moralist, and uncle to a famous Roman poet. The former of these describes him as a man of remarkable sweetness of disposition and great popularity. These gifts, attractive as they are, have often been serious snares: and they were so in this instance. An amiable person is often weak in principle: he cannot stand alone: he cannot do or say a strong thing, even where duty is most clear and imperative. And a popular person cannot bear to risk that favour: if he must take a side, he will be found on that of the multitude, and not on the side of God. Such was Gallio. His very virtues were weaknesses. If he refrained from doing wrong, it was rather to save himself trouble than to obey conscience or to please God. And often a man of this character awakens the hopes of the wicked, even where he does not gratify them. That easy, good-tempered, compliant person, surely, men say, we can make a tool of him; he has not the resolution to resist us: and thus he invites wrongdoing, and multiplies around himself

those circumstances of difficulty to which he is most unequal. The character of Gallio tempted the Jews of Corinth to drag Paul before his judgment-seat. Theirs was a tolerated religion; and they would place him outside that pale. His, they said, was an illicit offshoot from Judaism: the Empire which protected them was bound to punish him. For once the very indifference of Gallio was of service. He saw an escape for himself out of an embarrassing position. The charge was out of his jurisdiction. If it were an act of crime or wickedness, of which he was asked to take cognizance, it would have been only reasonable that he should bear with the tediousness of the investigation. But if, as he now perceives, or thinks he perceives, the question is one of mere doctrine, of names and terms, of a Law purely Jewish, tolerated by the Empire, but not adopted or recognized; if this be all, they must see to it themselves: he does not choose to be a judge of such matters. So he drove them from the judgment-seat, and turned to matters more important or less wearisome. He must get through the day's business, and then turn to pleasure. The proceeding had a singular corollary. The mob,

always unfriendly to Jews, and generally showing a sort of rude sympathy with the falsely accused, seized upon Sosthenes, the ruler (or one of the rulers) of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment-seat; in retaliation, it should seem, for his part in the frivolous charge against another. The name of Sosthenes occurs in the 1st verse of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, as the name of a Christian brother uniting with St Paul in that communication to the Church of Corinth: whether the person spoken of in the Acts afterwards became a convert, or whether a different person is intended, we know not, and must submit to doubt.

The narrative, thus far pursued, of St Paul's first sojourn at Corinth, has suggested one or two reflections which must suffice for this evening.

1. Let us take fully into view the character of Gallio. Like Demas, the lover of this world; like Diotrephes, the lover of pre-eminence in the Church; like Agrippa, the half-persuaded to be a Christian; Gallio has become a byword of the Gospel, as the type of the indifferent and the let-alone bystander, who, whether this doctrine be true or false, whether this conduct be right or wrong,

whether this soul perish or be saved, *cares for none of these things.* We have just touched, in passing, upon the mischief done by such characters to others and to themselves. They tempt men to tempt them. They encourage hopes in the wicked, even where some conflicting yet still unworthy motive—such as the love of ease or the dread of inconvenience —prevents them at last from satisfying them. But what shall we say of the character itself? What shall we say of one who, in a world of sin and suffering, lives on frivolous and indifferent? of one who is never roused by human distress or by human danger to any higher feeling than that which is altogether of self and of earth and of time and sense? Is it possible to conceive of any character more exactly opposite to the one perfection which is set before us in Christ Jesus? O where should we have been, the best of us, if that had been the mind of God? if it had been enough for Him to *dwell in the high and holy place,* caring for none of those things which were happening and to happen upon His earth below? Is there indeed any sign of evil more decisive than that light, that indifferent, that trifling or else scoffing spirit, which nothing

can arouse either to *rejoice with them that rejoice*, or to *weep* the tears of sincerity *with them that weep*? And is not this too much the characteristic of our own age, of our own world? What is the popular literature of the day, but a light and ludicrous portraiture of human life? What spark is there amongst us either of a generous enthusiasm or a noble indignation? Alas! we have spent long before maturity every impulse of a warm-hearted sympathy; we have adopted a jesting or bantering or sneering tone, at first as an affectation of manliness; and now it has grown upon us into a second nature! And thus the young man of this day is one who has pretended not to *care for any of these things*, until the care itself is smothered and at last eradicated within. O for the entrance of that life-giving Word which corrects the selfishness of nature and kindles the fire of Divine grace! Then at last, then only, will men learn what true greatness and what true honour is. Then does the dignity of the Roman magistrate, with the lictors, and the fasces, and the curule chair, and the jurisdiction of a province, and the power of life and death—yet the iron fetter within upon the soul; of a disgraceful selfishness, a deep ungod-

liness, an inveterate vice, or a degrading fleshly lust—grow faint and pale before the lustre of a spirit not of this world; the spirit of a devoted piety, and the spirit of a large-hearted and a self-sacrificing humanity! These are the lessons of the school of Christ; nowhere else learned, and yet, when learned, commanding the respect and the reverence even of the world which looks on!

2. Set in contrast with Gallio St Paul himself. What a singular history! What a problem for the unbeliever! How inexplicable, in all its bearings, save on one hypothesis; that the Gospel is true! What an epitome is his life of all Christian experience, in its lights and shades! There is a man working all the day at a common manual trade. He sits close at it. To all appearance he is a man earning a livelihood; and nothing more. Day dawns upon him, and night closes; and still *these hands* (as he once said elsewhere) are *ministering to his necessities;* working out by hard, steady, ignoble toil, the support of the body, the supply for himself of shelter and fuel, of food and clothing. That is what appears. A man might look in upon him in his humble dwelling many times in the day, and see nothing but this. And yet those

very hands have wrought miracles! They have been instrumental, under God, in healing the sick, in giving sight to the blind, in casting out devils; yea, in communicating the blessed and life-giving Spirit of God! It is of these very hands that it is written, *When Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.* And those eyes which are now intently fixed on the coarse tent-cloth which he is stitching into an accommodation for desert-travellers, those eyes have often been wet with tears of repentance and of charity; even as it is written, *Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears;* and again, *Of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping;* and again, *I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears:* yea, far stranger still, those very eyes have *seen Jesus Christ our Lord,* and *blinded with excess of light* were closed afterwards for three days in a darkness as profound as it was typical! And even now, even from this house of Aquila in Corinth, he is writing letters which for eighteen centuries afterwards shall be read as portions of the inspired Scripture in all the congregations of the East and of

the West! His two Epistles to the Thessalonians were written at this time and under these circumstances. Therefore it is no fancy and no illusion to say that we know what he was thinking of as he wrought at that trade of tent-making. Read the two Epistles to Thessalonica: ponder the joys and sorrows, the anxieties and the reassurances, there described: mark the direct revelations of divine truth there disclosed; the prophecy of the Resurrection, of the Apostasy, of the Man of Sin, of the glorious Advent of the Lord and Saviour: and then you will understand something of that contrast and of that combination on which we are dwelling; something of that mysterious twofold life, the outward and the inward, the bodily and the spiritual, of which he spoke himself when he said afterwards in writing to this very Church at Corinth, *We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us: we are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus,* His risen life, *might be made manifest in our body.*

3. Finally, the passage before us presents one other Person, one other character, and one other life. Our Lord Jesus Christ, though taken up from us into heaven, is yet *not far from every one of us.* With His servant St Paul, in the solitude of a crowded city, amidst the occupations of a humble calling, amidst the distresses of an often depressed spirit, and the discouragements of an often despised and rejected ministry, Jesus Christ Himself was, always really, sometimes visibly or audibly, present, suggesting just those thoughts and offering just those consolations which He saw to be suitable to his case and need. *Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace; for I am with thee. I have much people in this city.* Thy work here is not wasted. There are those in this city, and many of them, whom I am purposing by thy ministry to add to the congregation of such as shall be saved. Trust thy work with thy God: through clouds and storms He will clear and shape thy way: *immortal till thy work be done,* thou shalt here see much fruit of thy labour; and when the earthly day ends, still thy work shall follow thee.

I have much people in this city. They were not to be seen as yet. There was a veil

over them. But they were there; and Christ could see them though man saw them not. May it be so here, and with us! May each Sunday's Services and Sermons, may each Communion and each Confirmation, be the means, in Christ's hand, of disclosing and revealing them! And even if we never know them; if their faith and love be still veiled from us; if they are known (to the end) only to One who seeth in secret; known only to Him who marks their souls' struggles, counts up their sorrows, and puts their tears of contrition and repentance into His bottle; still may they be there! may they be amongst us, redeeming a sinful and ungodly place from the condemnation of a total apostasy from Christ! Help, every one of you, in yourselves first of all—in your own hearts, and in your own lives—to prove and to make true the saying, *I have much people in this city!* And so at last, when earth's toils and sorrows are ended, and the glorious harvest and the awful vintage have alike been gathered in, may it be given to us to rejoice together, loved and loving, in that eternal joy, in that unbroken peace, in that heavenly rest, which *remaineth for the people of God!*

LECTURE III.

TRANSMISSION OF TRUTH.

ACTS XVIII. 27.

Who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace.

SCRIPTURE is a storehouse of character. The Word of God teaches largely by example. It shows us truth in action, principle in practice, and faith in works. And it shows us the opposite of these things. It holds up the mirror to fallen as well as to renewed nature; and exhibits ignorance, unbelief, idolatry, worldliness, and the love of sin, in its working: as though to say this to us, Choose now which you will be; this, or that: *I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; therefore choose life!*

Sometimes a single glance is afforded us, and the picture instantly withdrawn. A man is presented, to teach us a single lesson: one phase of his character is exhibited, and the rest is veiled: the Word of God only wants him to point one moral, and then he is dismissed: as though to teach us, alike by what is given and by what is not given, how much and how little is man in God's hand; important, if God deigns to use him; insignificant, utterly insignificant, when God has done with him and let him go.

At other times a person is kept long in view. We are allowed to see him through and through, whether he be good or whether he be evil. Saul in the Old Testament, and Paul in the New, stand as it were for days and years upon the stage of that theatre which is human life, and before that vast body of spectators which is the human family on its way to eternal life or eternal death. Gallio appears but for a moment: his slight lesson is soon taught: the man "sweet" to his friends, the man popular with the world, the man of amiable impulses and shallow principles, stays but to show us how many, in their inmost souls, *care for none of these things;* care not for the conduct of others, care not for the happiness of others, care not for the well-

being of others in eternity or in time; care not for God's truth or God's kingdom or God's will, but only for their own little pastimes, paltry interests, or selfish gratifications.

Gallio has left the place of judgment: we read no more of him in Scripture. But the word of God, and he who does the will of God, abide for ever. St Paul is still in view: he *tarried there,* at Corinth, *yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren,* and sailed away from Cenchreæ. How much had been done in those eighteen months! When he entered Corinth, he was alone and a stranger: his first efforts had been little successful; the Gospel made way slowly, and seemed at times on the point of being overborne and extinguished: now he leaves behind him a flourishing Church; there are those in that city whom he can call *brothers;* and he takes with him not recollections only, but associations and affections too, which will exercise an undying influence upon the fortunes of the Universal Church. Out of that stay at Corinth sprang afterwards, for all time, two precious heirlooms of Revelation; the 1st and 2nd Epistles of St Paul to the Corinthian congregation itself.

On this voyage St Paul was accompanied

by his new friends, Aquila and his wife Priscilla. One little incident of the departure has occasioned much controversy. Was it St Paul himself, or was it Aquila, who had a vow upon him which came to an end at Cenchreæ? *Having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.* It is impossible to decide the question absolutely; and persons will be guided in their opinion chiefly by their idea of the probability of the case. Was it likely—and the question answers itself differently in different minds—that St Paul, on any occasion of danger by land or sea, should have made a vow to God in case of deliverance? a vow indicated, like the Nazarite's, by suffering the hair to grow uncut during its continuance, and now terminated by the sign here described? We know from the 21st chapter that St Paul did not consider such a vow wrong: he was still a Jew, and the observance of the Law, in any of its ceremonies, was not wrong for him: we can only say that the form of the sentence is ambiguous in the original, and that the word *having shorn* might be connected either with the nearer name (Aquila) or with the more remote.

Crossing the Ægean sea—a voyage of from

ten to fifteen days—they reached the harbour of Ephesus. His companions were to remain there: he himself stayed only so long as to hold one conference with his Jewish countrymen on the all-important questions which engrossed his life. Interest was awakened by this one discussion; and though he was unable to remain longer on this occasion, he promised, in taking leave of his hearers, to return to them if it were the will of God. St Paul did not use that expression lightly. St Paul saw God's hand in all that befell him; and the words, *if God will,* had for him a real and a simple significance. Let us, my friends, whether we use the words or no, at least cherish the thought. Let no plan be ever formed, for a work or for a journey, but in the serious recollection that life itself is in God's hand, and that without the concurrence of His Providence we can accomplish no purpose of our hearts.

He sailed from Ephesus to Cæsarea; went from thence by land to Jerusalem, and, after *saluting the Church* there, returned to Antioch, so long the head-quarters of his ministry. Thence he started on a third Apostolical journey, beginning as before with Asia Minor, where he visited for the second time the districts of

Galatia and Phrygia, *strengthening all the disciples.*

It was while St Paul was thus occupied, that a new teacher arrived at Ephesus. *A certain Jew, named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was (already) instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught accurately the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue.*

You see with what precision the state of his knowledge is described. He could teach, and he made it his business to teach, *the things of the Lord.* He had been *instructed in the way of the Lord.* We must suppose that he was not only aware that the Messiah had appeared, but was acquainted with our Saviour's earthly history, with the fact of His death, and even with the fact of His resurrection. Less than this could scarcely justify the description. He knew accurately, because he could teach accurately, the things of the Lord.

And yet, it is added, he knew only the baptism of John. He was in the state of

those twelve disciples at the same place, mentioned at the beginning of the next Chapter, who, when questioned closely by St Paul, were found to have received no other baptism than that of repentance, as administered by our Lord's forerunner, John the Baptist, who could only point to the Lamb of God without being able to communicate the gifts of grace. In short, the deficiency indicated in Apollos, as in them, at the time here spoken of, was an ignorance of the true doctrine of the Holy Spirit. He, like them, *had not so much as heard whether there was any Holy Ghost;* not ignorant indeed of the name and of some of the operations of the Holy Spirit—the Psalms of David, and other parts of the Old Testament Scriptures, would have taught him that—but, ignorant that the Holy Spirit had (in the Christian sense) yet been given: he had not yet heard of that full outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as the Light, and the Guide, and the Strength, and the Comforter, and the very presence of God within, which was the distinctive promise, and which is the characteristic gift, of Christ, to His servants, old and young, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, in these latter days, under this Dispensation of the Gospel.

St Paul's friends, Aquila and Priscilla, were of course frequenters of the synagogue worship: and there they heard this earnest and eloquent, though as yet only half-enlightened, champion of the faith of Christ. They were struck, no doubt, alike by what he had and by what he lacked. *They took him to them, and explained to him the way more accurately. The way* is an expression often used in this Book for the Christian doctrine and the Christian life. In both of these, Apollos, with all his gifts and with all his zeal, was a mere beginner. *If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.* And though Aquila was a sincere man, and an earnest man, and a bold and fearless preacher of the truth so far as he yet knew it, still, not knowing that Baptism of the Holy Ghost which alone brings a man into Christ and Christ into him, he not only had much to learn, but (in a very important respect) he was *in darkness even until now.* They therefore, this husband and wife, these two private Christians, took him to them, eminent as he was in comparison with them, and powerful in the Scriptures, and probably admired and followed already for his eloquence; they took him to them—received him with

great kindness, with all regard and even reverence for what he was, and with a longing wish to see him that which as yet he was not—and set out before him, in conversation, with all patience and persuasiveness of Christian love, that part of *the way*, of the truth of Christ and of the life of a Christian, which till now he knew not. His heart was right with God; and therefore he was a humble as well as honest learner. That which he knew not, God now taught him. And soon he was equipped for the prosecution of his ministry in regions beyond. *When he was disposed to cross into Achaia*, that province of which Corinth was the capital, *the brethren*, that is, the Christians at Ephesus, *encouraged him* to do so, *and wrote to the disciples* in Achaia, and particularly at Corinth, *to receive him. And when he came* there, *he helped much* (*contributed much to*) *those who had believed through the grace* of God: *for he vigorously confuted the Jews publicly, showing by means of the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. We have found Him*, he might say to them, *of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph.* Thus were the words fulfilled, which St Paul wrote afterwards from

Ephesus to the Church at Corinth, *I planted, Apollos watered; and God gave the increase.*

And what if there were some in that Church of Corinth, who sought to separate what God had joined, and to set up him who planted and him who watered as heads of rival and conflicting sects; one saying, *I am of Paul,* and another, *I am of Apollos?* yet did no such antagonism divide the hearts of these good men from each other: the very same Epistle tells us in its last chapter how St Paul, instead of grudging to Apollos his influence at Corinth, was urging him to return thither; and how Apollos, instead of courting opportunities of extending and cementing that influence, was the one to abstain of his own free will from giving scope to its exercise. *As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time.*

And now let us turn to ourselves, and enquire what we may learn from the brief narrative thus presented.

1. First, we are struck by the illustration here given of the Providence of God over human lives. Here are persons, born in the most

remote regions of the world, separated from each other by every variety of circumstance, yet brought together, in the changes and chances of this mortal life, to affect one another in the deepest sense of all, and with reference to the very highest interests. Take only these three persons; Aquila, Apollos, and St Paul. One from Rome, one from Alexandria, and one from Tarsus. Europe, Africa, and Asia, each contributes an element to this combination. Can we doubt, when we consider how much hung upon that conjunction, not for themselves only, but for generations and ages to come, that it was, in a true, in a real sense, of God? God, who *can do nothing certainly except He do all things really*, arranges the various movements and associations of human life, making all conduce to our discipline, to our trial, to our improvement (if we will have it so) and our sanctification, or else (if we will not have it so) to our self-exposure, humiliation, and fall. If we at all knew the momentous interests involved in every human life; the worth of the soul, the certainty of the judgment, and the awfulness of eternity; or if we at all knew, on the other hand, the weight of that influence which association with others

exercises, for good or evil, upon the state of the soul, and consequently upon its final destiny; we should not hesitate to ascribe to God a Providence in these matters as minute as it is absolute; we should love to trace that Providence in the lives of others, we should love to acknowledge and to give thanks for it in our own.

2. Again, we are reminded, in the passage before us, of the progress which there is and ought to be in every Christian life from a less to a greater measure both of light and grace. Our condition on earth is not a stationary but a growing life. There is no such thing, with reference to any part of our being, as a standing still. To stand still is to go backwards. Most of all is this so in the things of God. It is a terrible sign when we are satisfied where we are in the spiritual life. We have all, the wisest of us, much to learn. We have all, the best of us, much to attain. It was so with that good man of whom the text speaks. Apollos was already *mighty in the Scriptures* when he came to Ephesus. Already he was able to *teach accurately the things of the Lord.* And yet he was ignorant at that time of one whole department, the deepest and the most vital, of Christian truth. He knew nothing

then of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. If he had not been open to instruction, if he had thought himself too wise to learn, if he had said or thought that, being already a teacher, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, it was not for him to receive help from others, yes, even from a Christian woman, you see how ill it would have been for him: he would have lived and died only half a Christian. Yes, there is a progress for all of us still, however far we have already journeyed, or however great may be our attainments in the Church and school of Christ.

3. But a third remark is, that, though we have all of us still much to learn and much to attain in the Christian life, we must earnestly use that which we have already received. We do not yet know all that we shall know, nor are we yet all that we shall be. But that is no reason for keeping to ourselves, or for hiding under a bushel, the light we have. It is in using that we acquire. It is in standing fast that we go forward. It was by teaching in the synagogue what he already knew of Christ, that Apollos put himself in the way of those who could teach him more. A sense of deficiency is no excuse for idleness. Nor is a consciousness of

imperfection any plea for reserve and concealment as to those Christian convictions which God has already implanted in us. It is *to him that hath*—and the context of that verse shows us that the meaning is, to him that useth that which he hath—that *more is given.*

4. Again, the passage before us teaches a serious and surely an encouraging lesson to more advanced Christians as to the proper treatment of persons in a less mature or a less enlightened condition. You observe how Aquila and Priscilla felt and acted towards Apollos. They heard him utter in the synagogue what they must have felt to be a most imperfect doctrine. They saw that there was not only an omission, but what they regarded as a most important, a fatal, omission, in his public teaching. He *had not so much as heard,* evidently, *whether there was any Holy Ghost* yet given. And we all know how many Christians in our day would have behaved towards a teaching thus defective. They would have gone home to criticize, to deplore, or to condemn. They would have stamped the man at once as a teacher of error, or at least no teacher of the truth. They would have deserted at once the ministry of that man, and sought out for them-

selves one more enlightened, more in accordance with their own convictions, or (as they might justly have said) more profitable to their own souls. Not so did those good Christians of whom we read here. Recognizing to the full the natural gifts and the spiritual graces of this new teacher, and yet deeply feeling the serious deficiencies of his knowledge and of his doctrine, they sought him out carefully in private, gave him their confidence and accepted his, and in calm serious conversation laid before him those deeper mysteries of Christian truth which were the life of their souls, and which they desired to make also the life of his. I am sure, my brethren, that the word has a lesson for these times, and for us who are here assembled. We ought to be ever on the watch for opportunities of leading onward those who are now behindhand in the doctrine or in the life of Christ. Instead of shrinking as we too often do from close personal communication with others upon the things of the soul and of eternity, we ought to make it our business to seek it. There are those who are longing for it; those who are sadly complaining that Christians, true Christians, are always ready to talk of anything but of the one thing; those who

greatly miss, and deeply deplore the want of, that real and effectual sympathy which only heart can give to heart in the daily difficulties and struggles of a Christian life on earth. And instead of pronouncing such or such a person a man of defective or erroneous opinion in the things of Christ, and there leaving him; instead of considering it a sufficient reason for avoiding close contact with him, that we see him or imagine him to be at present destitute of some integral portion of that truth which is our own stay and comfort; we ought to think how differently Aquila and Priscilla dealt with Apollos, and how richly rewarded was that self-denying patience with which they sought to lead him onward into the clear light and full happiness in which they were already dwelling and walking.

5. I will add yet another application of the subject. How simply does the office of a Christian towards others—whether it be the office of a Christian pastor, or of a Christian layman, or of a Christian woman—resolve itself into a work of helping! We read of Apollos, that, when he had been more fully instructed in Christian doctrine by the kind agency of these two Christian people, and had himself, at

the entreaty of those who knew his great gifts, passed on into Achaia to minister to the Church of Corinth, he *helped much*, by the grace given to him, *them which had believed.* It is a beautiful and instructive expression. How much is involved in it! What an idea does it convey of the obstacles which a Christian has to encounter! There are great rocks in our path, threatening to obstruct our progress, and too heavy oftentimes for our unaided strength to roll out of the way. What a real assistance, in such cases, may another hand afford us; the helping hand of a fellow Christian who has known and faced and surmounted the same difficulty himself! And how intricate sometimes is the choice of paths, as we thread the labyrinth of life! What a real assistance, in many cases, may the voice of a friend afford us, if he can say, *I have tried many of these paths, but this is the right one: do not follow that; it will lead you into a morass: do not follow that; it will lose you on the dark mountains: take this: this is the way, walk thou in it!* And how heavy sometimes is the weight which we have to carry! how it oppresses our frame, how it bows down the back, how it makes us faint and cry out for weariness as we totter along

the way! What a real assistance, at such times, is the offer of a Christian friend to share the weight with us; to relieve us by his brotherly sympathy, and thus to fulfil the law of Christ! And how arduous sometimes is the work which has to be done! What a multitude of separate duties, no one of which can safely be neglected, does the opening of a new day sometimes unfold to us! how unequal sometimes is the strength, bodily, mental, or spiritual, to cope with all these! And then what a real assistance it is, if some known and tried voice will offer to divide them with us; will say, *I think I can do this for you: let me go here for you or go there; and between us, perhaps, we can accomplish that to which, alone, you are unequal!* And how difficult, sometimes, is the discernment of truth! how puzzling the adjustment—for a thoughtful mind, bent upon truth and impatient of darkness—of the conflicting elements of Scripture doctrine! how painful to be obliged to say, *It is too hard for me: I must give it up: all is confusion: there is no light!* What a real assistance, at such times, may be the voice, in public or in private, of the well-instructed and the sympathizing teacher, who can bring into the dark chamber the lamp of

discernment and of revelation, unravel the tangled web, draw harmony out of discord, reconcile the jarring elements, and justify the ways of God to men!

Yes, in all senses, the office of Christians towards each other is a work of helping. If they are not there to do it, there is a Holy Spirit who can work alone. But it is their business to be there. It is the business of each one of us to help another. O, if we looked with a Christian's eye upon the scene around us; if we rightly understood the momentous issues of life and death contingent upon earthly existence; if we really felt what ignorance is, what temptation is, what sin is, in itself and in its consequences; if we could at all put ourselves in another's place, and feel everything as we should feel it if it affected ourselves; how great a difference would be made in our thoughts, in our words, and in our conduct! What a definite purpose would be given to our now desultory life! What a tender interest should we feel in distresses and dangers which we now pass by unregarded! What a privilege should we think it to be permitted, much more to be commanded, much more still to be specially commissioned, to give help one to an-

other! What zeal would be given to our efforts for the relief of pain and sorrow, for the communication of knowledge, for the cure of sin! Let the words sound in our ears, until at last God plants them in our hearts, *My work on earth, whatever I am in station, is a work of helping: and it is the same work which Christ Himself, which the Holy Spirit Himself, came and comes to perform!*

Happy are we, if any one can call us, even as St Paul called those two persons of whom we have spoken, his *helpers in Christ Jesus!* if there be any one upon earth, who owes to us the removal of one obstacle, or the lightening of one burden; much more, his conversion from error and the saving of his soul; his first and decisive *turning from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God!*

LECTURE IV.

THE GOSPEL TEST.

ACTS XIX. 2.

Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?

A SEARCHING question, my friends! God grant that it may press upon us as it ought!

It was first put by an Apostle; and we must see what it meant on his lips.

St Paul, after a circuit through the congregations of Galatia and Phrygia, briefly mentioned in the preceding chapter, at last reached Ephesus. He had promised this visit, and was received (we cannot doubt) with expectation and with respect. Two friends were there awaiting him, Aquila and Priscilla. They had been preparing his way by private influence!

and in one instance at least, they had been permitted to equip a faithful soldier for the army of the Lord Jesus Christ. Very probably St Paul at Ephesus, as before at Corinth, *abode with them and wrought.* He reminds the Ephesian Elders, in his address to them subsequently at Miletus, that *his own hands* had *ministered to his necessities* during that prolonged abode in their city of which we are to read the beginning tonight.

But it is upon his ministry, not upon his circumstances, that our eyes are now to be fixed. How did that ministry begin? What was the nucleus of that community, to which and of which such excellent things are spoken in the great Epistle to the Ephesians?

St Paul was (in the best of all senses) a "waiter upon Providence." He did not rush into a city with a ready-made lecture or sermon, and deliver it amidst scoffing and mocking crowds in the chief place of concourse. When he reached a new scene of labour, he thoughtfully surveyed the opportunities which it afforded to his Gospel. Was there any family, or any body of persons, in that place, prepared in any degree for its reception? Who was there who already believed in the one

true God? Who was there already in possession of that inspired Scripture, which, even in its earlier and darker half, is *able* by God's grace *to make men wise unto salvation?* To that house, or to that community, he first applied himself. Jesus, he said, had come from that God; Jesus, he said, had fulfilled that Scripture: He was the promised Saviour, the expected Redeemer: they were looking for Him, and He was come: *by such signs—of power and of wisdom and of holiness, of words above man's and works above man's, of a life such as man never lived, and then of a victory over that grave which is the end of all living—by these things he proved Himself to be man's hope and man's rest and man's satisfaction, strength and life: and I, I who speak unto you, am His witness: I have seen Him alive after death: I have seen Him, and He has spoken to me, and He has sent me!* That was St Paul's method wherever he found himself. His object was not to create a nine days' wonder, but to lay a solid foundation for a real and abiding superstructure; a foundation of unassailable truth, and a superstructure of unassailable faith. To him twelve men, really convinced and thoroughly changed, were

worth whole crowds of surprised and amazed and admiring auditors, who came to wonder and departed to forget.

The Church of Ephesus was founded on this principle. Twelve men formed its nucleus. And we are told exactly in what state St Paul found them, and exactly how he dealt with them.

They were already *disciples*. They used the name of Jesus: they not only knew of a Messiah, but they believed that the Messiah was come. Here then all was prepared for the Apostle's teaching. Here was more than a synagogue; more than the possession of the Old Testament Scriptures: what lacked they yet?

He came among them with a single question; and it was the question of the text. *Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?* or more precisely, *Did ye receive the Holy Spirit after believing?* Did ye, after coming to faith in Christ, receive that outpouring of His Holy Spirit which is the sign and seal of His chosen? That was the question. It was a very definite question. It referred to a gift which could not come without their knowing it. And it referred to a

gift which ought to have come, not only in a marked way, but at a certain particular time; as we shall see presently.

The answer was as plain as the question. They said, *We have not so much as heard*, or, *We did not even hear*, we were not even told, when we first believed in Jesus Christ, *whether there be any Holy Ghost.*

Now it was impossible for any reader even of the Old Testament Scriptures to be ignorant of the existence of the Holy Spirit of God. The very second verse of the Bible speaks of Him. Creation itself presupposed and demanded Him. Darkness rested upon the chaotic deep, till *the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters*, and brought discrimination, order, and beauty, out of the formless and shapeless and lifeless mass. And the devotions of holy men of old recognized more than the mere existence of God's Holy Spirit. It was the prayer of the Psalmist, *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me: Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy holy Spirit from me: Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free Spirit:* and again, *Teach me to do Thy will;*

for Thou art my God: Thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness. All that is good in man has ever been the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore these disciples at Ephesus could not literally mean that they did not know, that they had not even heard, whether there was any such Person as the Holy Spirit. What they say is, *We did not even hear, when we believed, whether there is such a thing, in the Gospel sense of the words, as the Holy Spirit;* whether, that is, the great promise of God to the Church, as conveyed by His Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Joel—the promise of a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church of the Messiah—is yet accomplished and fulfilled.

If any doubt could otherwise have rested upon the meaning of this question and its answer, it will be removed by a reference to the 7th chapter of the Gospel according to St John; where, after the record of our Lord's great proclamation at the Feast of Tabernacles, *If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink: he that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his inward part,* from his innermost being, *shall flow forth rivers of living water;* the Evangelist adds, *But this*

spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him were to receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, *because that Jesus was not yet glorified.* The word *given,* you will observe, is in italics: it is no part of the original text: it is added for the sake of explanation. The original is just as here; *for the Spirit was not yet*—or, *for not yet was there,* in the distinctive Gospel sense of the words, *a Spirit—because Jesus was not yet glorified.* The great promise, of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church and in the days of the Messiah, was not yet fulfilled; even as our Lord Himself said, *It is expedient for you that I go away; for, if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but, if I depart, I will send Him unto you.* The Holy Ghost was not yet come, because Christ was not yet gone.

Even so it is here. These disciples at Ephesus had not yet heard of the great day of Pentecost. They had heard of Jesus; of His ministry, of His death, probably of His resurrection. They believed in Him as the Saviour: but they had not yet heard of the fulfilment of His great promise of the Holy Spirit to be the Light and Strength and Life of His people.

Not to have heard this proved them to be

ignorant of the very elements of Christian truth. *Unto what then were ye baptized?* Christian Baptism is a Baptism *into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.* Christian Baptism is the appointed way of admission into that Church in which, as its very chiefest possession, the Holy Spirit dwells, for the participation and use of each one of its members. *Into what then were ye baptized,* if you have not so much as heard whether there be any such Holy Spirit?

The answer explained all. They had only received the Baptism of John; that is, of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ; of him who pointed to Jesus as He walked, and said, *Behold the Lamb of God;* but who stood, himself, outside the gate of Christ's Church, insomuch that it was said of him, *Notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven,* in the Gospel Church, *is greater,* in privilege and in possession, *than he,* the greatest of the prophets. This Baptism was a Baptism of repentance, and a Baptism of preparation. It spoke of sin and defilement; it spoke and prophesied of cleansing; it bade all men prepare themselves for His coming who was the very Paschal Lamb, the actual Light of the world, the Redeemer

and Saviour of Israel and of man. But it was designed only as a temporary and a preliminary ordinance; inasmuch as after it came a Baptism not of water only but of fire; not of repentance only and reformation, but of the personal presence of the Holy Ghost.

When they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them; and, as the sign of His inward grace—a sign needed then, but now withdrawn—*they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And they were, in all, about twelve men.* Thus were fulfilled in them those words afterwards addressed to the same Church from a Roman prison, *In whom (Christ) also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise; who is the earnest of our inheritance, unto (to secure) the* actual *redemption,* by resurrection, *of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory.*

I have sought, my brethren, to explain honestly the original sense and application of the text, as spoken to the twelve Ephesian disciples. They were not ignorant of the name or of the influence of God's Holy Spirit in that sense in which He is the Author of all good in

the hearts of men. What they were ignorant of was His special communication of supernatural gifts and of distinctively Christian graces to the Gospel Church of God. It is a humiliating thing to say; but I can almost fear that this distinction itself is beyond some of us. I fear that, to make the matter at all suitable or at all intelligible to our hearts, we must disregard the difference which has now been pointed out, and say, in any sense, the very humblest of all, to those who are here present this evening in the sight of God, *Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?* Happy if any of us can return a better answer to the enquiry than (in its literal sense) that which is here written, *We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.*

The miraculous gifts of the early Church are withdrawn. Withdrawn, we believe, chiefly because they had done their work. Withdrawn, because it became Him, who doeth all things wisely as well as graciously, not to retain as wonders things which had lost their necessity as signs. They who will not hear Moses and the Prophets, Christ and His Apostles; they who will not be convinced by the experience of Christian lives and Christian deaths witnessed

through eighteen long centuries of the Church's history; they who will not be awed by God's terrors, nor drawn by God's mercies, as they feel the one and the other in the course of His Providence, the workings of conscience, the revelations of His word, and the strivings of His Spirit; neither would they be persuaded, however they might be startled or stupefied, if foreign tongues were to be spoken, unlearnt, by modern Missionaries, or sudden predictions of an impending Advent were to interrupt Sunday by Sunday the utterance of the Minister or the devotions of the congregation. These miraculous gifts are gone by: and we could neither pray for their revival, nor even reproach our faithlessness with their cessation. It is in His ordinary rather than in His extraordinary gifts that we trace the hand of God now. No man is left altogether destitute of God's gifts, who has the Spirit of repentance, of faith, and prayer. That man has a power, the greatest of all powers, with him and in him still. That man may well say that he has received even the gifts of the Holy Ghost since and because he believed. But the miraculous gifts are withdrawn.

Now as there is a gift which none of us in

these days possess, so there is a gift with which all members of the Christian community are endowed, till they utterly quench and sin it away. We do believe that Christian Baptism is not in any case a mere idle form. We pray in that Service for the regenerating influence of the Holy Ghost: and though we cannot define the nature of the answer, we do believe that there is an answer; that no baptized person is exactly in the position of the unbaptized, either in point of advantage or in point of responsibility. Certain we are that God's promises are personally sealed upon him, in an ordinance of Christ's appointment: certain we are, that at least God is accessible to that person, regards him as a child of the covenant, and is ready to bestow upon him (in answer to his prayer) every one of the manifold gifts of grace.

I wish to put aside these two applications of the text; the one as impossible for any, the other as certain for all; the miraculous gifts of the Spirit as gone by, the baptismal gift of the Spirit (whatever it be) as ours without question; and thus to clear the way for the practical and most solemn enquiry, *Have ye received the Holy Ghost,* in His graces, in His individual and personal influences, in

those things which all may have now and yet which not all now possess, *since ye,* ye yourselves, *came to believe?* It is in reference to these graces, most certainly, most distinctively, of all, that the words of the great Apostle were written, *Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.*

I need say to no one here present, that in this respect the Holy Spirit is only where He acts; and that, where He acts, He shows that He is acting; and that, where He shows His operation, it is by signs of a certain particular nature, written down for us (that we may all know them again) in Holy Scripture. *Thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.* And you are all familiar with one place in Holy Scripture, where the chief signs of the Holy Spirit's working in a man are brought together and as it were counted over. That passage is found in the 5th chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians. I cannot enumerate tonight all those qualities which together are there called *the fruit of the Spirit,* and contrasted in detail with *the works of the flesh;* the signs of Divine renewing grace, with the indications of fallen

and corrupt nature. I will select almost at random just three of them, to serve as heads of enquiry, when we are asked by St Paul, and by One greater still, *Have ye received—hast thou received—that Holy Spirit,* which all who believe in Christ *were to receive?*

1. *The fruit of the Spirit is joy. Are you happy?* the text says. You do not look so. Your brow is often overclouded; you seem anxious; you seem ill at ease; you are often irritable, hasty, discontented, almost quarrelsome. I know that you have an excuse for this: you say your circumstances are perplexing; trade is bad; a livelihood precarious; the sky of the future dark and lowering. St Paul might have said many things of this kind. When he begins to speak of his life, you would almost think he was *of all men most miserable:* he did not occupy a home, he had no loving wife, he had no prospect of a time of rest when, after many troubles and tossings, he might sit down in peace and expect a tranquil end. In every respect but one, I will venture to say, St Paul was worse off than you. And yet St Paul could say when he was asked, *Hast thou received the Holy Ghost? Yes, for I have joy! I am filled with*

joy! I am exceeding joyful: yea, I can glory in tribulations also! The fruit of the Spirit is joy. If a man has the Spirit of Christ, in the same degree he is a happy, yes, a joyful man. My friends, do not put away from you this first test. If at first sight it is a strange one, or if you think it one of the latest and most exceptional signs of the Spirit, still on reflection you will find it worthy of all acceptance: for could anything so recommend the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to a man living in a troublesome world, as this fact, that it offers him joy? joy at once? joy every day? joy in sorrow? The man who has knelt down to pray disconsolate and sad in heart, shall not rise again, if he prays through Jesus Christ, and if he prays for the Spirit, without having felt his burden unloose itself and roll off from him; without being able to say, in some real though humble manner, *Yes, the fruit of the Spirit is joy!* And if the glory fades again; if the world comes in upon him, or sin, or the devil, and overcasts and overclouds this bright day within; at least he knows whither to come back to regain his joy: he must kneel down again, and pray again, until at last he can say, *Now I can obey the charge, Rejoice evermore, be-*

cause I can understand that other charge, Pray without ceasing. The fruit of the Spirit is joy.

2. Again, *the fruit of the Spirit is gentleness. Are you kind?* Do you think of the feelings of others? most of all, of those of your own house? Do you never allow in yourself that miserable excuse, *It is only my way: I know that I am sharp and hasty and unreasonable and provoking: but it is only the manner; it is only the outside: I do not mean it?* We read again, and let us think of it, *The fruit of the Spirit is gentleness.* There are other words in the list, of the same character. *The fruit of the Spirit is love...The fruit of the Spirit is longsuffering...The fruit of the Spirit is goodness...The fruit of the Spirit is meekness.* Yes, not only this passage, but every part of the Gospel, is full of this topic. And how bright would human life be, by comparison, if it also were full of this maxim, *The fruit of the Spirit is gentleness.* Alas! where is the house in which some ungentle spirit is not more or less marring the general tranquillity? Even good manners, even refinement of mind, even the polish of social intercourse and high breeding, cannot succeed in doing thoroughly this work of the Holy Spirit. Other things break down

somewhere: they who are courteous to strangers are not always courteous at home: they who are agreeable to equals are not always considerate to servants: there is a want and an inconsistency somewhere in all these: it is only that power which dwells within, that Divine Spirit which touches the very spring of being, which can make gentleness uniform, make it genuine, and make it heart-deep. *The fruit of the Spirit is gentleness.*

3. Finally, *the fruit of the Spirit is temperance.* It is a larger word in the original: self-control, self-command, self-mastery, inward strength. It is not one appetite only which it rules: it is all the appetites. It is not that counterfeit, spurious virtue, which casts out one evil spirit by the help of others, and compounds for pride and contempt and self-righteousness and utter ungodliness, by deifying one single abstinence into man's sole virtue. It is the grace of inward mastery. It is the power of saying *No* to inclination. It is the not being brought under the power of anything, save the law of God, save the love of Christ. It is the firm resolution, and the strength to act upon it, to do nothing and to say nothing and to think nothing, which reason and conscience

and revelation discountenance or disapprove. And who shall say that this too is not a fruit of the Spirit? Who has got this without being a Christian? Yes, I know there are abstemious men, and temperate men, and regular men, and moral men, without a spark of true Gospel light or love within them: but I say that even such men break down somewhere: either they are proud, or they are selfish, or they are cold, or they are unloving, or they are uncharitable: they are not men of *inward mastery,* when that word is made to include all duty and all virtue: for without godliness there is (in the Scripture sense) no such thing as temperance: he who is absolutely to rule himself must, first, be redeemed by Christ Jesus, and, secondly, possessed by the Holy Spirit. *The fruit of the Spirit is temperance,* is self-government, is inward mastery.

My friends, I commend to your earnest study the three tests briefly touched upon this evening. Ask yourselves, be not afraid to ask yourselves, *Have I received the Holy Ghost?* Remember, the gate is not yet locked and barred against you; the gate of promise, which is the gate of prayer! Blessed for ever in the

congregations be His Holy Name, who has made this, and this only, the condition of His unspeakable gift,

TO HIM THAT KNOCKETH IT SHALL BE OPENED!

LECTURE V.

THE WORD GROWING MIGHTILY.

ACTS XIX. 20.

So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

SOME persons are ever on the watch for points of difference. They feel an unamiable pleasure in thinking themselves wiser or better than another: and even when they would do good, they do it chiefly by finding fault. The sense of superiority is gratified, and the honest desire to *win souls* is not in them.

How unlike him whose ministry is pourtrayed for us in this Book! St Paul, when he taught, ever started from some point of agreement; and when he would correct, always began with something which he could commend.

The remark is appropriate tonight. Observe his course at Ephesus. We saw him, last Sunday evening, looking round (as it were) on his entrance into the city, and arranging for himself the order of his operations. Is there any one in Ephesus who agrees with him entirely? any one whom he can live with and work with altogether as a Christian brother? Yes, there is his new friend Aquila: with him and his excellent wife he can share every feeling: perhaps here, as at Corinth, he even *abode with them and wrought.* Who next? Who goes some way, if not the whole way, with him, in religious faith and practice? Are there any persons in Ephesus already called *disciples?* Yes, there are twelve men, who know something of the way of the Lord: to them he will first address himself, treat with them on common ground, and lead them on into the higher doctrine of Christian Baptism and of the Holy Spirit. Thus the way is made sure as far as it goes. A man who would do God's work must first see how far God has done it to his hand. If there is one who is only defective, he must not be treated as if he were outside the pale: he must be taken up where he is, and carried onward. Next, there are

those who, though not believers, in the Christian sense, have yet a true knowledge and a true faith so far as God Himself is concerned. There are those who have the Old Testament Scriptures, and think that they possess in them the materials of eternal life. To their synagogue therefore, in the third place, St Paul wends his way, and for three whole months is chiefly occupied in arguing with them, out of their own Scriptures, that Jesus is Christ. *The Hope of Israel is come, and I am His messenger.* It is not until the Jews as a body have decisively taken their line, and have begun openly to calumniate the truth of Christ before the multitude, that he *departs from them and separates the disciples,* transferring his daily instructions concerning the Kingdom of God to *the school of one Tyrannus;* probably a teacher of rhetoric or philosophy to the youth of Ephesus. Henceforth the Church and the synagogue are two, not one: the Jews of Ephesus, like the Jews of Jerusalem, have had their opportunity: they have not *known the time of their visitation,* and now, if they enter at all, must enter as a remnant, enter as individuals, and enter with the crowd. For two years this continued, until the word of the Lord Jesus was

preached throughout all Asia; spreading, by the ministry both of St Paul himself (it is probable) and of his immediate converts, through the whole of that portion of the western coast of Asia Minor to which the name of *Asia* (in its most limited meaning) was appropriated, and in which were now beginning to be planted those *seven Churches of Asia* to which the last revelation of the risen Saviour was communicated some years later by the beloved disciple St John.

I stop you, my friends, for a moment, at this point, to ask your attention to two single expressions in the verses now touched upon.

The subject of St Paul's persuasions in the synagogue of Ephesus was a thing called *the kingdom of God.* It was the establishment of this kingdom; its nature, its laws, its privileges and immunities, most of all, its Sovereign and its subjects; which St Paul took for his constant text before that audience of three months' duration. *The kingdom of God.* That same kingdom for the *coming* of which we pray whenever we utter the Lord's own Prayer. *Thy kingdom come.* That kingdom of which our Lord said, It is *within you;* and St Paul himself to the Romans, It is *righteousness,*

peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Surely no question can be more urgent for a Christian congregation than this, Am I inside that kingdom in heart as well as in form? Is God my King, in the sense of One who is within me by His Holy Spirit, working in my heart His great yet secret work of righteousness and peace and joy? If not, I may be called a Christian, but Christ's own word tells me that I am *none of His.*

And then there is another name for the thing to which St Paul called them. His opponents, the unbelieving Jews, *spake evil of that way,* more exactly, *of the way, before the multitude.* The Christian doctrine and discipline is called a way; a road, or a journey. Our Lord Himself calls it a narrow way, leading up at last to a narrow gate. But take it as a way; a road of some kind; and your life as a journey—a journey of some kind—along it. I do not ask now what its characteristics are; steep or level, rough or smooth, short or long, easy or difficult. I only ask, Are you in a road? Are you taking a journey? Yes, I know life without Christ is a journey; a journey with circumstances, and a journey with events; a road marked by its milestones, and a

road with a grave for its end. But evidently Christ's way is something more than this common one; something definite and distinctive, which only true Christians tread. In short, a Christian has not only to get through the life of this world, bearing its troubles as he may, and by slow stages reaching its close: but he has a rule to travel by; the rule of Christ's word and Christ's will: and he has an end to make for; the recompence which Christ has promised, the rest which God has prepared in heaven for His people. Are you aware of any such difference between yourself and a person who knows only the life of this world? Are you living by any rule of Christ's, or making for any destination on the strength of Christ's promise? In this way we must try ourselves whether we are in any sense in the faith.

A singular scene now opens.

Every great city has its peculiarities. We have noticed on former occasions the characteristics of some of those cities to which the Gospel came by the hands of St Paul. We have seen how it faced the philosophers of Athens, and the merchants and voluptuaries of Corinth. Ephesus was a different place from either of these. It was an Asiatic, not an European

city. It was a city with one dominant superstition, the worship of the goddess Diana; and with a host of smaller superstitions growing out of it. In particular, it was the head-quarters of magical art. All sorts of charms and incantations were devised and sold there. Amulets which were to preserve men from bodily danger, and formulas which were to ward off demoniacal fascination, constituted no unimportant part of the very trade of Ephesus. Mysterious symbols, called *Ephesian letters*, copied (I believe) from inscriptions on various parts of the great tutelary idol, were purchased and carried about as a safeguard to the possessor from perils ghostly and bodily. "The study of these symbols was an elaborate science: and books, both numerous and costly, were compiled by its professors."

Here then was a new field for the operations of the Gospel. When Moses was confronted with the magicians of Egypt, he first beat them on their own ground, and then led the way where they could not even pretend to follow. Up to a certain point we read that *the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments;* imitated and rivalled his wonders: at last they endeavoured, *but they could not;* and *then*

the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God. It was somewhat thus with the sorcerers of Ephesus. A credulous age was caught by their pretences: the world was full of vagabond exorcists: every eye was turned to prodigies and their interpretation: the natural consequence, at all times, of the loss of that true spiritual communication which is with God only. Generals, statesmen, and kings, of that generation, might have used the language of Saul when he made his unholy application to the witch at Endor, *God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do.* A truer art has taught us where and how alone the guiding hand can be sought and found. But to a race sunk in such superstitions it was needful that the Gospel too should assert its miraculous strength. As scrolls and rhymes were thought powerful against calamity, so it pleased God to *work* in this one place *special miracles—works of power,* the original language calls them, *not the ordinary—by the hands of Paul:* marvels of supernatural healing, wrought, without word or even presence, by means of *handkerchiefs or*

aprons brought from his body. Just as *the hem of our Lord's garment* was on one occasion the medium of conveying a medicinal virtue to a distressed and suffering woman; so here also the instrument of healing was not a voice or a hand, not even, as we read in the 5th chapter, *the shadow* of an Apostle *passing by;* but clothes brought from his body, the application of which gave health to the sick, and deliverance to the possessed.

And why not? *God wrought by the hands of Paul:* when God works, who shall let? If He works by means, if He works without means, if He works against means; alike in every case He works with wisdom, works with authority, and works with success. Let us not cavil, but adore. Let us learn, and not judge. *He hath done all things well.*

It was natural that imposture should try its hand at a work so remarkable. Evidently *the name of the Lord Jesus* was St Paul's one charm. St Paul never left it in doubt whence his power came: it was God's power, not his: it was used in Christ's name, not his own. Thus some of the *vagabond Jewish exorcists*— some of those professed wonder-workers who wandered about the cities of Asia, making a

trade of their sorcery in the pretended dispossession of evil spirits—*attempted to name over those who had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul proclaims.* They tried the effect of this all-powerful Name, when uttered by their own unbelieving lips. My friends, it is playing with edge-tools to preach a Gospel—still more, to try practical experiments with a Gospel—which we ourselves do not believe. It was so with these Jews. One particular family, of seven brothers, sons of a person described as *a Jewish chief priest*—that is, we may suppose, the principal Jewish priest residing at Ephesus—is mentioned as having attempted this spurious exorcism. But on one occasion, when two of them were using the sacred name over a man possessed, they were answered, in awful tones, by the evil spirit itself, *Jesus I know, and Paul I know: but who are ye?* The possessed man, with the united strength of a madman and a demon, flung himself upon the two brothers, and drove them from the house *naked and wounded.* The rumour of this defeat spread through Ephesus; carrying with it the assurance that this was no new superstition added to the already crowded wonder-

market of Ephesus, but a serious and superhuman power which it was alike fatal to counterfeit and impossible to resist. And where persons who had already been brought to believe the Gospel had still continued, even as Christians, to practise the unlawful arts of sorcery, they now came forward, under the impression of this terrible event, confessing their deeds, and making a public renunciation of a traffic to which till then they had clung. And not only was this the case with the converts of Ephesus: *many of those who had practised magic brought their books together*—the scrolls upon which the mysterious characters already spoken of were inscribed—*and burned them before all men,* in recantation of a lucrative but (as it was now seen) unlawful profession; and when they attempted to make a computation of the value of the mysteries thus sacrificed, they found that it amounted to no less than *fifty thousand pieces of silver;* something more than two thousand pounds of our money.

So mightily grew the word of the Lord and prevailed. It was not a mere skulking, creeping progress; it was not a mere gradual acceptance, by one and another, of a religion commending itself to the hearts and minds of

men: it was, for once, a *mighty*—the word expresses almost a *forcible* and *victorious*—growth of the Word: a great battle had been fought, between the power of truth and the power of error, and the saying had been verified once again to the very senses of men, *Great is truth, and shall prevail!*

The passage on which we have dwelt is singular, as well as interesting. It seems to inculcate one or two lessons, applicable to all time, and appropriate to this time and to this occasion.

1. The Word of God, my friends, never tells us that there is no power and no subtlety in the devil and his agents. On the contrary, we are prepared to find much craft, and much worldly wisdom, and much marvel, and much strength too, in the spiritual powers of darkness. *The man in whom the evil spirit is* may be a very strong man; he can *overcome and prevail against* other men: there is but one stronger, even Jesus Christ Himself, and the man in whom the Spirit of Christ is. The revelation of the Man of Sin, as predicted in the 1st chapter of the 1st Epistle to the Thessalonians, is expressly said to be made *amidst all power and signs and lying wonders*, as well as *with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in*

them that perish. Never look, for a test of God's working, to mere power or to mere wisdom. There is a third element in God's triple seal; and if that be lacking, the other two come not from God, but from God's enemy; and that third part of the seal is goodness; holiness, likeness to God Himself in His moral nature. Your eye may be caught, in this nineteenth century, by many a dazzling meteor of wonder and sign: art itself has its miracles, and designing men will persuade you that those miracles are just as great and just as divine as any that first or last authenticated the Gospel: tell them, my friends, in answer, that such arguments are beside the mark for two reasons; (1) because the wonders of art, be they never so marvellous, come to attest nothing; are not wrought by One professing to come from God with a revelation, and appealing to them as the proof of His mission; (2) because they are accompanied by no such attributes, in the doer, of words above man's wisdom, and a life above man's holiness, as could alone complete the triple seal, or prove anything decisively as to their Divine origin. The Gospel brings all signs of God's working; not one only, nor two. Its wonders are not powers only, nor prodigies,

nor miracles: they are signs: they point to God's hand, and they summon to God's footstool.

2. *Jesus I know, and Paul I know: but who are ye?* So speaks the evil spirit to those who would counterfeit against him the authority of Jesus. A terrible rebuke, my friends, in all time, to those who presume to intrude themselves into Christ's ministry without His faith and without His commission! Some persons would turn the whole force of the warning against unauthorized or self-constituted teachers; against those who take to themselves the office of the ministry without being lawfully ordained to it in this our established Church of England. And no man can value more than I do the sense of rightful Ordination; the feeling that I neither sent myself, nor took to myself this office, but was appointed, *according to the due order of this Realm, to the ministry of the Church.* It gives a man great strength, if he knows how to use it, to be a lawfully ordained man: he may well thank God for it and take courage. But I dare not make this the whole, or indeed the chief part, of the lesson to be drawn from this terrible example. A man had better be a self-ordained man with faith, than

the most orderly of ministers without faith. A man wants, for the due discharge of his ministry, something more than a parchment title: Satan and his evil spirits do not flee before that: they can consent to it, and give it place, and yet hold their own in the very teeth of it. Sincerity, earnestness, zeal—faith in Christ, hope towards God, love to man for Christ's sake—these are the indispensable conditions of a successful ministry: these ought ye to have, and not to leave the other out! Let us be sure that we ourselves are rid of Satan's possession; let us see to it that we ourselves not only use the name but possess the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ dwelling and working within: and then the badge of our commission will be a reality and a strength: no retort will paralyze our efforts, and no traitor in the camp of the heart turn our own weapon against ourselves. *Jesus I know, and Paul I know:* and ye, even ye, in a later and a colder and a more scoffing age, may yet be treading in those sacred footsteps, and recognized, on earth and in heaven, as *ministers by whom men believe!*

3. We read here of certain persons, who, though they already believed, had not yet, not

until now, *confessed and shown their deeds.* In that great city of Ephesus—if we rightly read the sacred record—there were for a time men who worshipped God through Christ, men who came together to break bread with the faithful, men who shared in the privileges of the Gospel and professed to be bound by its laws; but who yet practised their curious arts; still carried on in secret the sale of their superstitious scrolls, and made what was for them an unlawful gain out of the credulity, the ignorance, and even the vice, of their neighbours. It was not until a very startling occurrence broke in upon their security, that they came forward to say what they had all this time been doing in secret. When they did come to thorough repentance, then they showed it by renouncing publicly their illicit practices, and burning publicly their superstitious books. They lost money by this, but they gained comfort. It cost them more than two thousand pounds: money which was thrown (as we say) into the kennel, and which might have procured endless enjoyment for them and theirs: money which some would say it was a sin to waste, and might have been even used to God's glory. They judged otherwise. They

saw that a critical time had come; a time when a man must take his line, and be altogether what he is to be at all. Therefore the first thing to be done was confession; and the second thing to be done was conflagration; the destruction, root and branch, of the cherished but forbidden thing. My friends, have we yet, all of us, done likewise? Is there anything in our hands or in our homes —any practice in our shop or our office—which we should not like the congregation to see? anything (to come closer still in our enquiry) in our hearts or in our lives, however secret, which we should blush for man to know, and which we cannot but be aware that God does know? Young men, have you all (literally) burnt your bad books? Have you nothing concealed or locked up, which can minister only to lascivious and lustful thought? Yes, the precepts of the Word of God, even in its less obvious parts, are very clear and practical: and sometimes it is the very unexpectedness of the admonition, its occurrence in a place where we thought there was nothing but history and narrative, which makes it so impressive and so startling. Count not the cost: be it in money, or be it in feeling; be it in

pain, or be it in difficulty, or be it even in shame; *come, and confess, and show your deeds:* then go and burn your books: part for ever with the bad habit or the unlawful gain: and then, then at last, then with a humble heart and a quiet conscience, *then come and offer your gift!*

4. *So mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed.* Yes, if the Word has sometimes its level and uneventful seasons; its years, and its quarters of centuries, of stillness or even of stagnation in a place or in a Church; it has also, blessed be God, from time to time, its resuscitations and its triumphs. For a while it lurks in corners and in secret homes; carrying on, even there, its beneficent work, in hearts penetrated and purified, tempers corrected and mortified, and duties of life gently and unobtrusively fulfilled. Even there, even then, the Gospel has its beauty and its glory: it is still God's witness, it is still God's presence and God's power below. But these are not precisely what the text speaks of. It tells rather of shoots and starts made by the Word; of battles openly fought, and victories unmistakeably won. At its darkest moments the Church has seen a rekindled light: some new

champion has caught up the soiled and trampled banner, and sprung forward to plant it on the topmost battlement of the enemy. Then a host of men spring from their lethargy, and a revival and a reformation of religion spreads through a land and a generation. Those are critical and responsible times; times, indeed, of God's visitation, when *he who is not with Christ* is felt and seen to *be against Him.* How is it with us? how is it at this moment in this town? Is there anything to be called a kindling of the torch of truth amongst us? Is there any *shaking* amidst *the dry bones in the valley?* any rising and returning to *the Father of our spirits,* in deep repentance, and in earnest purpose of amendment of life? May it be so! *It is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life:* and the life spoken of is the life of an endless age.

LECTURE VI.

THE LUCRATIVE CRAFT.

ACTS XIX. 25.

Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.

ST PAUL was an Apostle and an Evangelist: he was not a Pastor and Teacher. He was the wise Architect, who made the plan of the great building, saw its foundations strongly laid, and visited the work now and then in its progress: but he did not with his own hands shape the separate stones, or fit them into their exact place in the spiritual temple. It was not in many places that he stayed so much as a year: to Thessalonica he gave but a few weeks, to Corinth a year and six months, to Ephesus from two to three years. He was in the hands

of God in all these things. Where God opened a door, he entered: while the door stood open, he stayed. But, with a world for his diocese, he could not become the resident minister of any one city.

Thus, after almost unexampled successes, the time drew on for his quitting Ephesus. His immediate object was a second visitation of the congregations of Macedonia and Achaia; including no doubt among these Philippi and Thessalonica, Berea and Corinth. His further view extended to the mother Church of Jerusalem; and beyond that again, in the remote distance, to the metropolis of the world, Rome itself.

His preparation for this new circuit was the sending on before him of two of his companions, Timotheus and Erastus. One special object of their mission, though not here mentioned, was the forwarding of a charitable collection for the poor Christians of Jerusalem among the Churches of Macedonia and Achaia. We shall hear more of this hereafter.

To give time for their operations, and doubtless to complete his own work at Ephesus, he remained himself for a time in Asia. In his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, written

about this period, he says, *I must tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost: for a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.*

It was in this interval, after the departure of two of his more intimate associates, that an event occurred to which St Luke devotes the remaining verses of the chapter.

There arose at this time, he says, *no small stir about the way. The way* is the Gospel. The road in which Jesus Christ teaches us to go. The Christian's itinerary, or guide of the road, through earth to heaven. We have read in this book of many such *stirs about the way.* At Jerusalem, at Philippi, at Corinth—wherever the Gospel came—it roused into fierce opposition some element or other of the fallen nature. It might be vice, it might be superstition, it might be the pride of reason, it might be the prejudice of a bigoted religion. In this instance it was a very definite, a very powerful, though a very low and base motive; the mere love of gain; the selfishness of a sordid cupidity.

There was a magnificent temple in Ephesus, which ranked as one of the wonders of the world. A former structure on the same

site had been burnt to the ground, by a singular coincidence, during the birth-night of Alexander the Great. It had been rebuilt with extraordinary splendour: we read of its hundred and twenty-seven lofty columns, each one the gift of a king: the Ephesian ladies had given their jewels to its restoration: Alexander himself was not permitted—so jealous was the pride of the place—to inscribe his name upon the temple, though he would have purchased the honour at the price of all the spoils of the East. We who know what a fine Church may be to a town, can imagine in some faint degree what a temple like theirs must have been to the Ephesians.

A heathen temple had of course its deity. Inside the temple of Ephesus, placed in its shrine and veiled by a curtain, stood a celebrated image, saved from the conflagration of the former building, and believed to have originally fallen from the sky. It was not the graceful figure of the classical Diana, goddess of archery and of hunting, which was here represented as the object of worship: it was rather the shapeless form of an Indian idol, contrasting strangely by its wooden material with the magnificence around, and ex-

hibiting in repulsive imagery the genial influences of an all-sustaining Nature. Yet this rude and (to our conception) hideous object was the centre and rallying point of all that was sacred in the associations of Ephesus. And superstition in Ephesus had also, as elsewhere, yet more than elsewhere, its mercantile value. There was a whole trade, and a thriving one, supported by Diana of the Ephesians. Small models of the temple, and of its presiding deity, were manufactured in precious or commoner metals, and sold to residents and visitors, as at once sacred mementos and infallible charms. These are the *silver shrines of Diana* spoken of in this passage. Out of this apparently incongruous cause sprang the tumult which seems at one time to have threatened the very life of St Paul.

A silversmith named Demetrius, employing a large number of artisans in this lucrative trade, called together his workmen and other interested persons, to direct their attention to that new influence which was beginning to undermine the very foundations of their system. He briefly reminded them—eloquence is not wanted where there is self-interest ready to be inflamed—how they derived all

their wealth from this traffic in shrines, this manufactory of idols; and how *this Paul* had already perverted large numbers, not in Ephesus only, but throughout all that *Asia* of which Ephesus was the capital, into a disbelief of the national religion, *saying that they are no gods which are made with hands.* My friends, the paradoxes of one age are the axioms of another. We can almost smile at the credulity which could suppose otherwise; which could even imagine a silver shrine or a silver idol to be in any sense a god! Let us be thankful that we live in other days and under other influences; and let us pray God, every one of us, that we may be enlightened to see our own delusions in the form of other idols, which, if they be not embodied to us in the form of images or temples, are only on that very account the more insidious and the more dangerous.

It is a strong testimony to the extent of St Paul's influence at Ephesus, that this master-manufacturer should thus describe the perils to be apprehended from his Gospel. *Not only is this our craft in danger of coming into refutation,* of being exposed as a mere

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idolatrous superstition; *but also the temple of the great goddess Diana* is in danger *of being despised, and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.*

So much had the religion of an obscure Jewish peasant (as men speak) already effected, its enemies themselves being judges! Does it not turn to it for a testimony?

It was easy to kindle into excitement a prepared audience. The hint of pecuniary loss will turn a reasonable man into a madman. *When they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.* It was a relief to them to remind themselves and one another of the majesty of their idol, and to pledge themselves yet again in express terms to the maintenance of its supremacy.

The excitement soon spread from the workshop of Demetrius through the whole city. It is astonishing how crowds collect in a great city: one man fixing a steady gaze upon a single object, no matter how common or how insignificant, has been known to fill in a few moments a whole street or square with sympathetic gazers: how much more when a cry

runs through a population of some slight done to their honour, or some injury impending over their trade or their merchandise!

The theatre was the gathering-place of the mob of Ephesus: soon that spacious area was thronged in every part, and the stone seats, rising tier above tier, in ample circumference, were everywhere crowded with excited spectators. They had hurried along with them, in their rush towards the theatre, two of St Paul's remaining companions: he himself would have been with them, to take his share in the danger, and to seize the opportunity (should it be afforded him) of a word for his Master, but for the earnest remonstrances of his friends, amongst whom were not only the Christian converts, but also some of the *Asiarchs*, or presidents of the sacred games of Asia, who possessed under that title a high place among the influential men of the city and the province. The assembly was one of those tumultuous gatherings, only to be described in the words of the sacred historian himself: *Some cried one thing, and some another; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.* Such is the contagion of excitement. An electric spark runs through a

whole multitude: they have one pulse, one feeling, for the moment one soul: and yet if you ask any one why he is there, he cannot tell!

The Jewish population of Ephesus seem to have been anxious to set themselves right with this tumultuous assembly. They knew that the Christians were too often regarded as a mere sect of the Jews: at all events they too were by profession and practice foes to idolatry: a tumult roused against one body might turn against another: it was desirable that they should explain, and that they should repudiate, as they might. They put Alexander forward; (was it perhaps that *Alexander the coppersmith*, of whom St Paul speaks, writing to Ephesus in the 2nd Epistle to Timothy?) and Alexander would have defended himself and his countrymen from the imputation of complicity with the Gospel. But when the audience recognized him as a Jew, and therefore an enemy to their goddess, they refused to hear his defence, and, catching up the cry of Demetrius's workmen, could only ejaculate for the space of two hours, *Great is Diana of the Ephesians!*

There was one sensible man in office amongst them, and he gained a hearing at length for

the counsels of reason. He reminded his audience first of all that no one could possibly be ignorant of the identification of their great city with one celebrated faith and worship. They need not fear any shock being given to the national superstition. It was the proud title of Ephesus, to be the *worshipper*—or, more exactly, the *temple-keeper* and *servitor*—of the great goddess Diana, and of her celebrated heaven-sent image. There was no need therefore for this vehement assertion of a notorious fact. We can almost fancy a tone of irony in the magistrate's expostulation. *No one will suspect you,* he seems to say, *of being lukewarm or indifferent to that superstition which lodges and clothes and feeds you. This being so, why this heat and rashness? Who are these culprits, whom you have brought to this summary justice? Have they robbed your famous temple? Have they reviled your illustrious goddess? If Demetrius and his artisans have any injury to allege against them, there are assizes periodically held, and there is a Roman proconsul to hear and judge. If other questions, questions of order or public peace, are at issue, carry them to the lawful assembly. A tumultuous meeting of this nature not only*

exposes your city to censure, but may lead to a formidable interposition of the imperial power of Rome. By such arguments, of adroit compliment mixed with cautions not to be trifled with, the experienced man of authority tranquillized and dismissed the assembly.

At first sight some of those who are here present may perceive little that is of Christian edification in the long paragraph now brought before them. We are apt to pass over the addresses of Demetrius and the Ephesian registrar, as containing no matter of self-application or instruction in righteousness. And yet, my friends, even this section of God's Word will be found to teach us something about ourselves, and something also about Him.

What a selfish being is man! How he regards everything in its bearing upon self! Demetrius does not enter into the question, What is true? or, What is right? or, What is reasonable? or, What will please God, and bring a man peace at the last? He only says, Ye know that by this trade we have our wealth, and ye see that here is an influence spreading which will gradually destroy it. Upon this one argument all proceeds. A thing which will make a man one whit poorer in the wealth of

this world must be opposed, must be put down, must be punished, whether it be true or whether it be false! And we read the argument here, and wonder at its transparent folly. Yet, my friends, *suffer the word of exhortation:* it is the duty of your ministers to hold up the glass to you, that you may see, in any respect in which it is discernible, your own likeness in the men of old time. For this purpose were the historical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament written, that they may give us types and ensamples of human character as it is in all time. So let us use them now in this instance.

Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. The words have been echoed in every age; yes, and in our own. The fallen woman, who plies her weary and wretched trade in the weakness and wickedness of man, will tell you that it is her wealth: who will employ her? but for this she will starve. And the man who lives by no honest calling; the man who makes chance and speculation his business; the man who makes gain out of other men's inexperience, and builds his house out of materials plucked from another's; will he listen to you when you speak to him of piety or charity?

Will he turn a ready ear to the remonstrance which bids him think of God and think of man, think of the soul and think of eternity? Is not this, in substance, his answer to every call addressed to him by the Gospel, *Ye know that by this craft I have my wealth? A man must live: and this is my living?* And the publican who suffers men to drink themselves drunk in his house, and youths and maidens to dance there night by night till folly perfected has brought forth vice; what has he to say but that other men may afford to be scrupulous, but, as for himself, he has but a poor living, and he cannot sacrifice ought of it? *By this craft he has his wealth.* And the tradesman, who habitually gives light weight and short measure; who cares not if he be paid twice over, or paid for work not done; what is his answer to the call of conscience, when it plies him over and over with the unwelcome admonition, to *remember the end?* Is it not this? *It may be wrong, but every one does so: it may be wrong, but I cannot afford to be scrupulous: it may lose me heaven, but I am not rich enough, or not brave enough, or (perhaps he will say) not good enough, to sacrifice earth.* And so we run on, and run upwards,

from the lower to the higher ranks of our society, and we propose to each the same question, Are you quite sure that this which you are doing is lawful; lawful by the laws of man or of God? Are you quite sure that this part of your domestic gains, that this point in your professional practice, is strictly right, is perfectly honourable, is absolutely just as between man and man, is entirely pure and honest as between a man himself and his God? And we hear, over and over again, in the mutterings of self-excuse, or even in the throbbings of conscience within, the selfsame answer: and it is that of Demetrius and his craftsmen, *I know not whether it be right, but I know that it is convenient: yes, I know, and you know, that by this craft I have my wealth!*

And hence, my friends, ten thousand obliquities, which turn a man out of the straight forthright path of rectitude and virtue. It is just these unsettled, undecided, unexamined questions of right and wrong, which keep many a Bible shut, and many a knee unbent night and day before God. When shall we be persuaded that nothing can be in the long run expedient, which is not also right? that, as the God of the Bible is also the God of Providence,

as the Judge of all the earth is also its Ruler, as the Lawgiver of the Church is also its Saviour and its Redeemer, it must be well with those who are on His side: He can prescribe nothing which is not for our good, and He must in the end make it to be *ill with the wicked* and to be *well with the righteous.* What a dishonour is done to God, to His holiness, to His power, to His wisdom, yea, to His love, by keeping these questions day after day out of His court; out of the sight, if it might be so, of His Omniscience; out of the cognizance, were it possible, of His law and of His judgment! We love not to talk too often of *godliness having the promise of the life that now is*—in the sense of worldly prosperity being commonly the reward of the righteous—lest we seem to be encouraging that bargaining spirit which says to God Himself, *Deal Thou well with me, and I will pay Thee my vows!* But we do well to treasure up instances, which must be familiar to all of us, of a visible and material blessing vouchsafed to a youth of innocence and to a manhood of self-sacrifice. I love to recall the image of one who in his youth, in a house of business in a great commercial town of Eng-

land, being called upon to violate what he felt to be the sanctity of the law of the Sabbath, resigned his place and his emolument; began life afresh, casting himself only upon the promise of a faithful God; and lived to find himself the possessor of an ample fortune, which he used in every part to the honour of God and the furtherance of His Saviour's Gospel. Another man might have made the same sacrifice, and not reaped the same recompence below. God *giveth not account of His matters.* His promises are now (blessed be His Name) spiritual and heavenly, not transitory and earthly. But one thing every man will reap even below, who has the grace to give up houses or lands, prospects or emoluments, simply and honestly for the sake of doing God's will and obeying his Saviour's precepts. That one thing is a quiet conscience; the comfort and the dignity and the strength which follows inwardly upon a truly disinterested act: I call that a fulfilment of the promise of the *hundredfold now in this time:* how much more, when we take in the full significance of the words which follow, *And in the world to come eternal life!*

And have we not all seen the opposite

result? Have we not all seen the man who thought only of his craft—the man who cared not how much he oppressed or neglected the poor; how much he disregarded the rule of right; how much he swerved from the path of honour undetected; how much he used, and how much he extended, inch by inch, the accommodating standard of a worldly morality in worldly business; how much he slighted God, if he could but plead custom or authority or (what he timidly and unbelievingly calls) compulsion for doing so—have we not seen that man go downhill as he went onwards? Have we not seen him grow more and more hard and cold and preoccupied, more and more unamiable and less and less loved, more and more passed by and disregarded even in the world for which he had flung away heaven? have we not seen his old age the old age of the unhappy, and his deathbed the deathbed of the hopeless? Yes, if that man ever remembers himself then of the maxim which was his polar star in life—*This must I do, this must I keep, because by this craft alone I have my wealth*—surely, surely, he curses the day when he began to walk by it: surely he would fain exchange it, were it not now too

late for him—surely he will entreat his children, with tears and prayers, to exchange it betimes—for that blessed, that golden rule of the word of eternal life, *Keep innocency, and take heed unto the thing that is right: for that,* and that only, *shall bring a man peace at the last!*

I am not the conscience-keeper of this congregation: in that matter *no man may deliver his brother, nor make agreement with God for him.* But I am appointed to quicken, by the ministry of God's Holy Word, and in dependence upon God's Holy Spirit, the operation, in each bosom, of that conscience which is God's voice within. And I charge it upon each one who hears me to look well this night into his way and into his doing; to try and examine himself as to his mind and as to his conduct in the very sight of God; and to cast out of each that which he finds to be lurking there unhallowed and unblessed, by the help of a prayer, written surely, of old time, by the inspiration of the All-merciful, *Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*

LECTURE VII.

A PRIMITIVE SUNDAY.

ACTS XX. 7.

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.

WHEN a life is devoted to one work, with no side-aims or crooked motives, what a simplicity and what a dignity is given to it! If the work be but a human work, the duties of a profession, or the service of a country, a single-minded devotion to it will ensure and command respect. But if the work be God's work, if the object of life is God's glory, and if the

management of life is God's direction, then its dignity becomes a sanctity, and the respect due to it passes on into reverence. Then, too, that observation of Providence which in commoner cases sometimes shocks us as superstitious, becomes a truth and a reality: the accidents of such a life become signals; its openings for usefulness become Divine intimations, its sorrows a Divine discipline, its disappointments a Divine correction.

Such was the life of which we are reading. The tumult at Ephesus was not a danger only, it was a token. *The cloud was taken up from the tabernacle;* the rest was over, the journeyings must begin anew.

When the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and after embracing them went forth from Ephesus *to take his journey into Macedonia. When they persecute you in one city, flee ye into another:* such was the Saviour's order, and thus persecution itself became one of those signals, those Divine signals, of which we have just spoken.

The narrative is in this place singularly concise. Just ponder, my friends, the extent of journeying which these few words indicate, and the circumstances (as learned from St Paul's

own letters) under which these journeys were accomplished.

He was now acting upon a resolution expressed in the 21st verse of the preceding chapter. Macedonia, Achaia, then Jerusalem, then Rome; this was the order which he had prescribed to himself for his new travels. And all came to pass: because these things had all (as it is written) been *purposed in the spirit.* But how differently, both in order and method, from that which had been designed!

The historian was not with St Paul in this part of his wanderings. And so natural, as well as so truthful, is the narrative of God's Word, that, when St Luke is not present, we have but a very brief and concise summary of the occurrences which befell his friend. But for St Paul's own writings, we should have no idea of all that was wrapped up in this one journey. Having written his first Epistle to the Church of Corinth before leaving Ephesus, with a heart full of anxiety concerning the manifold errors of doctrine and practice which had already crept into that gifted but unstable community, he hoped to have met at Troas, before he crossed into Europe, that faithful friend whom he had commissioned to bring him word

again how his rebukes and remonstrances had been received and regarded at Corinth. He reached Troas, and the hand of God was with him. *A door*, as he expresses it, *was* there *opened to him of the Lord.* But his heart was too anxious to allow him to enter it. What a touch of humanity is there! The Apostle himself is too much depressed to work! Yes, my friends, a touch (we say) of humanity: but might we not say with equal truth, a touch of divinity? What was that depression? Was it one of the thousand causeless or trifling despondencies which affect and too often paralyze our daily life? Nay, it was a sorrow about souls; the souls of others; of others unconnected with him save by official ties; an anxiety about the spiritual condition of a congregation which was no more to him than any other; a congregation too which had ill requited his love, and which many a Christian minister would have renounced almost with indifference. St Paul could not work at Troas, because he was unhappy about Corinth. He was human; grief stopped his labours: but that grief was a Christian grief; that human sympathy was itself divine.

He pressed on into Macedonia, that he

might the sooner meet Titus on his return from Corinth. He did meet him in Macedonia, and his tidings were full of consolation. The Corinthians, as a Church, were penitent and obedient. There were still diseased members: but the body was sound. This was the main question. All else could wait: the Church was loyal. Under the first impression of this good report, St Paul wrote, from Macedonia, perhaps from Philippi, his second Epistle to the Corinthians. Read it afresh in this connection. Think of him, whom you have learned to know and to love from the history in the Acts, sitting down to dictate to his amanuensis those words of love and tenderness, not unmixed with tones of bold and manly severity, which lose much of their interest when they lose their key.

With equal brevity St Luke speaks of his *going over those parts;* implying, no doubt, an extended tour through the regions of Macedonia and Illyricum; many a Church revisited, and many a new Church established; and then *coming into Greece;* where, on this occasion, he *abode three months.* Nothing is said here of Corinth; nothing of that visit which was to fulfil the denunciations of his late Epistles; *I write to them which heretofore have sinned,*

and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare; of that visit which was to be the opportunity of *setting in order* all that was irregular, and reasserting his Apostolical authority by *proofs of Christ speaking in him:* nothing of that one still surviving memorial of this particular sojourn at Corinth, the Epistle to the Romans, for which the Universal Church has to thank God throughout its generations, and by which we may yet learn, concerning St Paul himself, what lofty meditations and what profound reasonings occupied his inner mind, while he was sojourning there in the house of Gaius, and prosecuting in the place and neighbourhood the ministry of the Gospel of Christ. The writing of this great Epistle, the chief storehouse of what is distinctively called Christian doctrine, corresponds with this 3rd verse of the chapter now before us. *He came into Greece, and there abode three months.*

It had been his purpose to sail, as before, from the port of Corinth, and without any intermediate visits to make his way direct to Syria. But his old enemies, the Jews, bent upon *filling up their sins alway* in opposition to the Word of truth, laid a plot for his destruction, which could only be baffled by an

entire change of route. He therefore retraced his steps by land northwards, and found himself once more amongst his beloved friends, the Christian congregation of Philippi.

There too he rejoined his biographer St Luke, as we learn by the resumption of the first person of the pronoun in the 6th verse, after its disuse from the close of the 16th chapter. St Luke appears to have been left at Philippi when St Paul quitted it after his first visit, and not to have accompanied him again on his journeyings until the close of that other (probably his third) visit to Philippi of which we are now reading the brief record. *We sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread.* The rest of his companions had preceded them to Troas. From this point onwards we shall have the guidance of an eye-witness to the end.

One incident of the stay at Troas will furnish us with an instructive topic of meditation in the words which follow.

Seven days, in all, were spent there. The last of these was *the first day of the week;* the day on which we are now assembled for purposes of Christian instruction, prayer, and praise. Let us see what a Sunday was at Troas, in the first days of the Gospel, with St Paul for the

preacher, the leader of the devotions, and the minister of the Sacrament.

And upon the first day of the week; not the Jewish Sabbath, but the day following it; *when the disciples were gathered together to break bread*—I need not tell you what that bread was, which was thus broken as an act of worship—*Paul discoursed to them, being about to go the next morning; and he extended the discourse up to midnight.* The dread of long Sermons had not yet fallen upon the congregations. Their hearts were full of the subject: and there was a sympathy between the preacher and the hearer, which made the time of listening pass quickly. From towards evening, until a late midnight, St Paul was still speaking to them the words of eternal life. Well can we imagine, from his recorded Sermons, and from Epistles still in our possession, what some of his topics were. How would he detail to them, first of all, the revelations which he had also received, concerning Christ crucified and Christ risen! How would he set before them one and but one object of trust; a Saviour dying for our sins, and raised again for our justification! How would he show them, again and again, the lost state of man without Christ, and the

completeness of him who possesses Christ! How would he expose to them the secret workings of their own sins, and the utter futility of all human efforts, apart from Christ and from grace, to conquer or eradicate them! How would he point them to the cross of Christ for pardon, and to the Spirit of Christ for renewal and life! And then how would he draw out before them the particulars of Christian duty; beginning with its work within, in habits of earnest and life-long prayer; and passing on to its work without, in a faithful discharge of every relation, and in the fulfilment of the all-embracing, the all-explaining, the royal law, of love to God and love to man! Beyond this, how would he warn them against the thousand perils and snares which would ever beset their onward steps, and commend them, with prayers and tears, to that omnipotent grace of God which alone would keep them from falling! We who know what was St Paul's sense of the precariousness of the spiritual life in man, can trace for ourselves the outlines at least of that discourse which prefaced, through long hours, the celebration of the Holy Communion eighteen hundred years ago in that upper room at Troas.

The whole scene is before us. The room itself is on the third story of a common dwelling-house: and from it there projects a recess or balcony over the street or court below. The night grew dark, and a number of lamps or torches illuminated the apartment where the congregation was gathered. In the recess, on a sort of window-seat—the window, or rather the shutter, open for coolness—sits a young man named Eutychus, a convert and a disciple. The heat, and the lights, and the late hour, and the long listening, bring on drowsiness: the head drops, the muscles are relaxed: gradually he sinks unnoticed, for every eye is bent upon the speaker: at last he falls through the open window, falls from the third story, and is taken up dead. In the alarm and confusion which follows, Paul himself goes down that outside staircase which commonly communicated between the balcony and the street; and then, finding life extinct, he follows the example of the Prophets of old, of Elijah and Elisha after him, and with earnest faith, and doubtless with a solemn appeal to the *God of the spirits of all flesh* to give efficacy to the act, throws himself upon the body, feels the breath come again, and announces in the name

of Christ to the agitated spectators, that *his life is in him:* the accident was *not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.*

Let us see, I said, what a Sunday was at Troas.

1. A Sunday at Troas. What is Sunday? It is not the Jewish Sabbath; not a day of gloom and bondage, of restrictions and penalties; not a day of meritorious observance or sanctimonious austerity. Sunday is the weekly festival, as Easter is the annual festival, of our Lord's Resurrection. It is the day on which we commemorate, to ourselves, to one another, and to the world around, that greatest of all events, by which earth was ennobled and glorified, and *life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel.* Already in the Acts of the Apostles, in the Epistles of St Paul, and in the Revelation of St John, we find this day marked with a peculiar distinction, as at once the most sacred and the most joyful. The very place of the fourth commandment, standing in the midst of moral rules, of rules forbidding idolatry, profaneness, murder, adultery,

theft; commanding reverence and devotion and duty and holiness; proves conclusively that there is a moral principle involved, as well as a positive precept; proves, in other words, that man needs a periodical rest for body, mind, and soul, and that God requires of him as a sacred duty the solemn separation and the religious observance of such a periodical rest throughout his generations. The Sabbath is an ordinance of Divine humanity; an ordinance testifying of the origin in the result, of the source in the stream, of the Giver in the gift. Man's restlessness, and man's selfishness, and man's cupidity, and man's irreligion, being what they are, how should man have invented, how should man have enforced, how should man have consented to or acquiesced in, the consecration of one day in seven to a solemn rest from labour, if One greater than man had not originated and had not prescribed it? Little does the working man, and little does the poor man, know his own interest, when he secularizes and profanes the Sunday! Once destroy the sacredness of the day, and the liberty of the day will follow. Once give the impression that you have no sense of religious duty in keeping the Sunday, and, depend upon it,

irreligious and unbelieving employers will soon find reasons for engrossing it, till God's gift perishes from the earth through the ingratitude of those to whom He gave it. It may not be true that the day of the Sabbath was ever expressly or formally changed from the seventh to the first: it may not be true that the day which we keep is precisely the Jewish Sabbath, or that we keep our Sunday in direct obedience to the law of Sinai: but this I say, that the moral law prescribes a day of religious rest, and that Sunday is, for us, the day so prescribed. It may be quite true that for a time both the days were kept, both the Sabbath and the Sunday, in Jewish Christian congregations; or it may be that the first Christians, in the fervour of a new devotion, needed not to keep either, seeing that the commonest working day was to them, in those first moments of an ardent piety, all and more than all that the holiest of Sundays can ever be to us. But this I say, that to us, living where we live, and when; so circumstanced, so surrounded, so influenced, and so tempted; Sunday is practically a necessity of existence, if we are ever to win or fight our way through this world to a better. And this I say, that, as it is a necessity, so it is also a duty;

that no man can neglect the Sunday and be blameless: the fourth commandment lives and speaks and enforces itself still: so long as earth is earth, and so long as man is man—so long as it is a sin to swear or to kill or to steal—so long I believe that the consecration of a portion of time, of one day in seven, to special religious purposes, will be a duty, and its desecration a sin: he who profanes the Sunday by business or by dissipation or by idle frivolity, will not be blameless; will be guilty of sin against God, will be guilty of unkindness and cruelty towards the best and highest interests of man. And he who asks the question, *Is it in the bond? is there any law of God which binds me under express penalties to keep holy the Sunday?* shows himself as incapable of entering into the spirit of the Gospel, as of estimating the blessings of God's Providence, and the claims of a far-sighted and a large-hearted philanthropy. Before the latest of the Apostles had yet exchanged earth for heaven, the day of which we speak, the day of which we are reading, the day on which we and the congregations of Christ's Church everywhere are now assembled, was known already, without ambiguity and without discussion, as the Lord's own

day. *I was in the Spirit,* says St John, *on the Lord's day.*

2. And now as to the employments of this day. Sunday, we have said, is our periodical rest; enforced, in spirit at least, by the Divine Law; endeared, to us all who believe, as the standing festival of our Lord's resurrection. But it is not designed to be a day of mere inactivity. The body rests by repose: the soul rests by action. The weariness of the soul is its prohibition from its own appropriate pleasures. The weariness of the soul consists not in over-work, but in cramping and compulsory restraint. While the body works, while the mind works, the soul is coerced and confined: it cannot turn to its subjects, it cannot rise to its home, it cannot refresh itself in its relaxations. Therefore that day of rest which the body wants for relief from labour, and which the natural mind wants for relief from labour, the soul wants rather for occupation; for that occupation which is at once its business, its food, and its repose; intercourse with God Himself; expatiation in the things of God; communion with the people of God on earth and in heaven.

i. The congregation at Troas came together,

as a matter of course, on the first day of the week. They came together, no doubt, for worship. They did not forget that special promise which is attached to united prayer; to the concordant requests of even two or three persons assembled in Christ's name. My friends, I am persuaded that we need in this place to be brought back to the simplicity of common prayer. I often wonder—nay, from the experience of a fallen nature I scarcely wonder—whether indeed we are praying in common. Two things go to this: (1) that each one pray, and (2) that each one pray as one among many; pray, that is, not his own selfish prayers, but his part in the prayers of the congregation. If I do not see all kneel, if I do not see every face buried in profound seclusion, I can scarcely hope that hearts are engaged: but even where these signs are not wanting, so subtle is the spirit of evil that I can almost fear still lest there be no earnest communication with God going forward; lest the heart be running on its own little affairs of business or pleasure, and no contribution be offered from that quarter to the work which (to be worth anything) must be the work of many concurrent hearts, of many concordant and sympathizing souls.

God grant that the reflection be brought home powerfully to some, What is my worship when I come hither with the congregation on this first day of the week?

ii. The Christians at Troas came together also to hear preaching. I know you will say, It would be easy to listen if St Paul were the preacher: it is because the preacher has nothing interesting, certainly nothing new, to say to us, that we find his words wearisome and his Sermons long. Do not think, my friends, that the preacher's task is an easy one: least of all, in these days of excitement, of *itching ears*, of impatient audiences, and ever changing as well as abounding interests. A Sermon has become in these days synonymous with dulness: to preach to a person is another expression for uttering tedious commonplaces to an unlistening ear. Every newspaper has its jest at preaching: he is a bold man who enters a pulpit, knowing that his very office has become a reproach. Nevertheless there are those who believe that preaching is still, as of old, an ordinance of God; believe that the Gospel, familiar as its central truth is to us, still needs enforcement; believe that the earnest words of a faithful man have instruction in them and

carry a blessing from on high after them. There are those who have found by experience that they are the better for preaching; that still, in its humbler measure, preaching, like the earlier and higher gift of prophesying, is enabled from time to time to search the hearer's heart and reveal to him its secrets, to carry light into its dark places, and bring a man to his knees before the judgment-seat and before the mercy-seat of God. The humble and earnest hearer shall not go away ashamed; nor will he go away to scoff at that instrumentality, poor though it be, because human and sinful, by which, from Sunday to Sunday, the instructions of Christ are ministered afresh to the congregation.

iii. But, besides united worship, and above listening to preaching, there was one special object of the Christian gathering at Troas. *The disciples came together to break bread.* In the first instance (if we rightly read the record of Scripture) the reception of the Lord's Supper was a daily act of the congregation. *Continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house.* Long did it continue the badge and the privilege of Christians to partake of that sacred bread

and that divine cup once in each week, on its first, its consecrated day.

How shall we dare to touch on this subject in a modern congregation? How many suffer months and years to slip by without one participation in that ordinance of Christian faith and love! how many, of those who most need its reproving and comforting power, of those whose lives are most suffering from the very want of this close, this personal contact with Christ! Worship may be disregarded by many: the streets of a town may be full of loiterers even while the Christian congregation is worshipping: Sermons may be disliked, despised, ridiculed: few may be deeply moved by them; many, even of those who worship, may go away to criticize or to jest at them. But even worship, even preaching, is practically honoured far above Communion: the Church may be half empty for worship, it is emptied again before Communion: a little handful, out of all the congregation, gather for that sacred feast in one corner of the building, and the bulk of the Church goes its way bold and unabashed, before the bread and wine are uncovered upon Christ's Table! My friends, these things ought not so to be.

They would not be, if one spark of living light were communicated to our souls in answer to believing prayer: they would not be, if our eyes could look onward to judgment, or upward to our Saviour's throne in heaven! Let us all pray tonight, that again amongst us, as of old, worship may become a reality, the word of God a guiding light, and Christ's Holy Supper a refreshing stay!

He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and He shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years.

LECTURE VIII.

A PASTORAL RETROSPECT.

ACTS XX. 26, 27.

Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.

For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

THE Sunday at Troas was ended. *Till midnight* first, then *till break of day,* Paul had *preached* and *talked* to those who grudged not the time to listen. The fall of Eutychus from the balcony on the third story, and his restoration to life by the Apostle's hands, had secured an everlasting remembrance for that farewell service. When morning dawned, the strangers departed: Gaius and Timotheus, with the rest of the Apostle's companions, including St Luke

himself, leaving Troas by sea; St Paul taking the first stage of the journey in solitude and by land. Even one whose heart is in heaven needs seasons of retirement. Even one whose work is all sacred—nay, surely he most of all—needs the periodical refreshment of his own soul by converse with a Father and a Saviour in heaven. The twenty miles' walk from Troas to Assos furnished, we doubt not, such an opportunity to the holy man whose life we are studying.

Following the windings of that jagged and indented coast southwards; sometimes passing and sometimes visiting those island and mainland towns which mythology and history have combined with nature herself in making beautiful and famous, but with an eye (we may well suppose) rather for Gospel openings than for picturesque or classic scenes; the little company at last reach Miletus, on its projecting headland opposite the mouth of the Mæander. They had passed near Ephesus, without stopping, the day before. St Paul was afraid of being tempted to stay, if he allowed himself to revisit that scene of so much toil and so much interest. He was anxious to reach Jerusalem, this year, in time

for the feast of Pentecost. Last Pentecost he had been at Ephesus: at Corinth he had wintered: at Philippi he had spent his Easter: now, by exertion, he might just reach Jerusalem for Whitsuntide: and at that great gathering of his nation from all parts of the earth, in the old mother city, he might hope for work, as he knew himself to be destined to suffering, in his Master's cause. He preferred therefore to keep himself away from Ephesus, as though he could scarcely trust himself within reach of its strong attractions.

But he could not find himself thus within twenty or thirty miles of that city and its congregation, without seizing the opportunity of some direct communication. He therefore sent word of his arrival to the elders of the Church of Ephesus, and requested them to come to him at Miletus to receive his parting counsels. We see thus early in the Church's history—nay, we saw it at an earlier point still—how careful a provision was made by the Apostles for the regular instruction and oversight of the Christian congregations. The institution of pastors and teachers is no modern fancy: it is a necessity of Christianity. The Gospel itself would soon die

(humanly speaking) out of many hearts, if they had not these holy days, and these means of grace, these prayers and sermons and sacraments, to carry on from week to week and from year to year the work of good once begun. Despise not these things: trifle not with them: procrastinate not: they are for your life!

The passage which follows is one of the most affecting in all Scripture. It sets before us an Apostle, one who had *seen Jesus Christ our Lord,* recapitulating his own work in a particular city. Incidentally it tells us what the true work of an Apostolic ministry is in all times and in every place. Thus it gives to the minister a touchstone of his fidelity. Is this my Gospel? Is this my object? Is this my teaching, and this my manner of life? He has to stand before his congregation, as hereafter (nay, as already) before his Master, to be compared with this standard. Terrible scrutiny! fearful ordeal! God make it less fearful, less condemning, for us, year by year!

And do not think, my friends, that the shortcomings or inconsistencies of the minister are any advantage, any cause of triumph, for the

Church, for the temple of God, *which temple ye are.* If *the ministry is blamed,* it is you who suffer. If the minister is punished, it is because your blood is upon him: it is because he has dealt unfaithfully with your souls, which are still in jeopardy of their salvation. Let us then seek, God helping us, to read these words together, as persons alike and equally concerned in them: and may not your ministers, as they read, address you in that brief, that pregnant saying of the same great Apostle, *Brethren, pray for us?*

The first portion of the address will suffice for this evening. I will give it you, with some accuracy, as it stands in the original.

Ye know—ye, without my telling you—*from the first day from which I set foot in Asia*—in that small district of which you hear so often as bearing distinctively the name of Asia, the district of the seven Churches of the Book of Revelation, with Ephesus for their chief and capital—*how,* in what manner, *I was with you,* I behaved myself among you, *during the whole time.* He appeals to them, as he does elsewhere to the Thessalonians, as to the manner in which he had conducted himself during his abode amongst them: *ye know*

what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

Serving the Lord. This was the principle of his life. Doing service, a real and definite and consistent service, to the Lord Jesus Christ. What a reality is there in the expression! Does it not set before us a living Person, the Master of a great household, the work of which, in all its several departments, may be done, and has to be done, by living men, as for Him, under His eye, according to His will, and for His glory? *Serving the Lord with all humility:* not in an arrogant, self-satisfied, self-asserting spirit, but as one full of infirmity and full of sin, who can count nothing that he does perfectly done, and who has every day to confess and bewail many an omission and many a failure in duty. *And* with *tears:* tears of repentance, and tears of sorrow; repentance for sins of my own, and sorrow over souls that will not be saved. *And* with *trials which befell me in the plots of the Jews.* St Paul was everywhere a man plotted against. His life was never safe. Again and again the Jews drove him from amongst his congregations by actual designs upon his life. At Ephesus, in particular, he mentions in the

1st chapter of his 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians some tremendous danger to which he had been exposed. And in the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians he uses a very strong metaphor to express the same or a similar peril, and speaks of himself as having even *fought with wild beasts at Ephesus.* Some of these things are doubtless indicated in the words now before us: *trials which befell me in the plots of the Jews.*

Ye know then, he says, *in what manner I behaved myself among you* in the midst of these trials. *How I shrank not,* drew not in, used no reserve, *as to any one of those things which were profitable, from announcing it to you and teaching you in public and at* your *homes, protesting both to Jews and Greeks,* asserting and pressing upon them with all earnestness, *repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus.* (1) He used no reserve: that is his first statement. He did not consider what would be palatable, or what would be popular; how far he could safely go, and where he must pause, in declarations of truth or enforcements of duty. He kept back nothing. His question was not, What will man like? but, What has God said? (2) Again, what he was in public, he was also in private. He did not

satisfy himself with preaching, in the synagogue or in the school of Tyrannus, once or twice a week, a bold and faithful doctrine: he taught also in their houses: there he expounded to the half-enlightened *the way of God more perfectly:* there he brought home to his less willing auditors truths and duties which they would fain lose sight of: there he ministered to the sick, comforted the sorrowful, and bound up the brokenhearted. *Publicly, and from house to house:* neither only; both alike, both equally. He was in earnest, not only to do his duty, but to effect a work. (3) And then, his subject. What was the sum of his teaching? We know, from his own words and writings, that it was a varied teaching. It was not the dull and monotonous repetition of a text or two of Scripture, or of a formula or two of doctrine. It was a rich and copious stream from a perennial and an exhaustless spring. But still its main purport, its direct end, what it sought and what it came to, could be put into words: and no words so full or so expressive as these, *Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.* The Gospel, when it comes into a man; when it passes, in any heart, from a buzzing sound into a living voice; *changes*

the mind (for that is repentance) towards God and God's enemy: makes a man hate as well as dread his own particular, his own besetting, sins; and makes him desire above all things, not to pacify, but to please Him, who, notwithstanding all his sins and all his provocations, has yet had mercy upon him personally in Christ Jesus. And the same Gospel, thus apprehended, makes a man believe in Christ: *Ye believe in God; believe also in me:* makes a man say and feel, *There is such a person as Jesus Christ, who died, who rose, who lives for me:* makes a man live as in His sight, and *see Him who* at present *is invisible.* That sort of sight, that sort of life, is faith, as the other particular was repentance. The two together made up St Paul's summary of doctrine, as everywhere, so at Ephesus.

There are many persons willing enough to hear Sermons; admirers of eloquent words, forcible arguments, or lively illustrations: but, of these, a large proportion wince, and draw off, and go back, when the plain demand of repentance comes home to them, and when the direct test of personal faith in Christ is closely and powerfully applied. Is it so with any who now hear me? Do you repent of

your sins as sins against God? And do you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as your own Saviour and Redeemer and Lord?

And now, behold, I, bound in the spirit; my spirit constrained and coerced, as it were, thus to encounter all that may be before me; *am going to Jerusalem, though I know not the things which shall there meet me; except that the Holy Spirit protests to me* everywhere, *city by city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I make my life of no* such *account,* I regard not my life as so *precious to myself, as* I do *to complete* (*in comparison with completing*) *my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to protest* (*to assert earnestly*) *the Gospel of the grace of God,* the joyful tidings of the free favour of God.

And now, behold, I know that ye all, amongst whom I went about proclaiming the kingdom, shall no longer see my face. My abode amongst you is ended. Never again will you see me going about amongst you as your daily counsellor, friend, and guide. *Wherefore I protest to you this day, that I am clear from the blood of all: for I shrank not from announcing to you all the counsel of God.*

I can scarcely conceive of any one as read-

ing these words without a sense even of alarm. For what do they say to us? Surely this. *God has a will and a purpose concerning men. He has sent us word of it in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They who receive that message, embrace God's mercy as there revealed, and walk day by day in the light of that revelation, shall be saved. They who refuse it must perish. If it be through their own rejection of the word faithfully communicated, theirs alone shall be the punishment. If the messenger himself have been unfaithful, he too must perish in their ruin.* I know these are unwelcome truths: many in this nineteenth century call them narrow and old-fashioned: but, till we get a new Bible, we must hear them in our Churches; and let us beware *lest haply*, in despising them, *we be found even to fight against God!*

We will not think of others: we have enough to do with ourselves. Let *the Judge of all the earth*, who must *do right*, deal, as His wisdom shall determine, both with the nations which have not heard of a Saviour, and with the multitudes who, in a Christian land, live as though that Saviour were not. Let us look within, not around. Tell me, my friends, how it is with you. Is it not true still of you, that *the thoughts*

of your hearts are revealed (as Simeon said of old) by your treatment of Christ? that, just in proportion as you are struggling against your sins, and feeling after God, and diligent in daily duty, you are also inclined to the thought of Christ, and to the sense of His mercy, and to the desire for His salvation? and that, on the other hand, when you are careless and worldly, when you are unamiable and perverse, still more, when you are cherishing any bosom sin, then, and in the same degree, you lose all interest in the Gospel, and at last even take a positive dislike to Christ? The words are dreadful to utter: but they are no exaggerated words. The sinner, who will nurse his discontent, who will neglect duty, who will (cost what it may) keep his sins, does, by no figure of speech, feel within himself a real repugnance, a conscious hostility, to Jesus Christ. He addresses Him in the very language of the demoniac, *Let me alone: I know Thee who Thou art: come not thus to torment me before the time.* I say not how it may be in the secret closets of philosophers and learned men. I ask not how far they may be described in the language just uttered. It is not to such men that we minister in this place. If there be any of them who can

reject Christ and yet love holiness; if there be any of them who find no connection between the revelation of the Gospel and the victory over sin; I can only say, their case is not ours: they need a different treatment, not of this place or time. For us, plain men, living in the haunts of common life, busied in its trades and professions, vexed by its changes and buffeted by its temptations, I am persuaded that I speak truth when I say that Christ and religion come and go together; the question lies, for us, between carelessness and Christ, between ungodliness and Christ, between sin and Christ; lies practically thus, and, for us at least, thus only.

And therefore I say that, in our case, at all events, the alternative is as serious, as awful, as St Paul here makes it. To refuse the Gospel is to refuse life and to choose death. To trifle or to procrastinate with the Gospel is to trifle or to procrastinate with the destinies of eternity. To put aside Christ is to choose sin: and *the wages of sin is death.* It is not with the refinements of modern criticism, and it is not with the intricacies of modern science, that we are concerned here. The question of faith or unbelief is, for us at all events, the question of godliness or sin.

Now if they who are charged with the office of elders in this Church must either be *pure from the blood* or chargeable with the blood of its individual members, it must be because your blood—that *blood* which *is the life*, the life of immortal souls—is critically and fearfully involved in the vital acceptance of the Gospel. That which is for them so anxious and so personal an alternative, is only such because it is so anxious and so personal an alternative for you. They are bound to declare to you the whole counsel of God: but that is because the whole counsel of God is connected and concerned with your salvation.

O, my friends, our interests are indeed one: never let us put them asunder! Never let us speak or feel as though it were our office to say, and yours to do; or as though (on the other hand) it were our business to find you out, and yours to escape from us and elude the search! The minister and the people are more one than you think. He has all your infirmities, all your difficulties, all your temptations, and some (he often thinks) of his own besides: some infirmities, and some difficulties, and some temptations growing out of his office, and rendering his course yet more steep and narrow

even than yours. He can feel with you in all the distresses which are common to man: and can you not feel, without his saying it, that he must have others also which are all his own? Think what it must be to him to have to declare to you, on pain of death, all the counsel of God! Can you not enter into the trembling anxiety with which he has first to learn and then to unfold it? Think what it must be to him to have to speak with authority, where he feels perhaps that his proper place is that of a learner and of a novice still! Can you not enter into some of those misgivings which make his heart fail him as he rises in the congregation to speak with feeble or stammering lips to some from whom he might hope rather to hear wisdom? There is no comfort for him, and no refuge, but in the recollection, as of a strength perfected in human weakness, so also of a community of interest to be expressed in an entire sympathy. Let him feel that you are running, with him, the race of eternal life. Let him feel that your prayers ascend with his to the throne of the heavenly grace. Let him feel that it would be no pleasure to you to hear of his halting, no joy to you to think of his at last missing his crown. Let him know that you are aware

of his responsibility, and that you sympathize with his anxiety. And then let him help you! *Not for that we have dominion over your faith,* writes even an Apostle, *but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.* The office of the minister is an office of helping. His life is given to the one work of aiding others, as God shall enable him, in the work of reaching heaven. If he rebukes sin, it is because sin would keep you out of heaven. If he urges faith, it is because *without faith it is impossible to please God.* If he calls to self-examination, it is because, *if we would* only *judge ourselves, we should not be judged.* If he pleads for the poor in earthly things or in spiritual, it is because thus you may *lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven,* and *find it after many days.* Thus in all things, rightly understood, the ministry of the Gospel, in its humblest offices and in the meanest hands, is a work of helping: a work in which the end and the motive and the means are all alike Christian faith, Christian trust, Christian charity, Christian love. Surely then we should all labour together, that all may at last rest together and be at peace in God.

O that a double spirit of life and love may be poured out upon the ministers and upon the

people! If the one might be endued with St Paul's spirit, the other would respond with a primitive devotion. And without it, we deeply feel, we sometimes bitterly feel, no multiplication of means of grace, no frequency of Sacraments, no iteration of doctrine private or public, can avail anything. Prayer and pains, prayer and patience, prayer and waiting, prayer and humility, and prayer again, these are God's instruments for great works below. Where these are, God is: and where God is, there is energy and there is strength. Let us not be overhasty to say, *I am pure from the blood of all men.* Where is he who has so prayed and so ministered, so entreated and so warned, so guided and so led the way, as that he shall have right to lay wholly upon his flock the bloodguiltiness of their own ruin? Rather would we ask of God such a spirit of self-abasement and of self-accusation and of self-despair, as shall drive us at last in utter helplessness to the footstool of His grace, of whom it is written, *They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.*

LECTURE IX.

THE COMPARATIVE BLESSEDNESS OF RECEIVING AND GIVING.

ACTS XX. 35.

Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

TAKE heed therefore unto yourselves—so the discourse proceeds from the point reached last Sunday—*and to all the flock, in which the Holy Ghost set you* as *overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He purchased by His own blood.*

Take heed to yourselves, and to the flock. Take heed, writes St Paul to his beloved Timothy, *to thyself and to the doctrine: continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and*

them that hear thee. A Christian minister must look to himself, to his own soul, first, or he cannot give heed to others. All must move, or all stand still, together: it is only by beginning at home, by beginning within, that a man can go on, effectively or even safely, to help and to save another.

The flock. How familiar a figure, yet how expressive! It is our Lord's own figure. *I am the good Shepherd: the good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep.* The flock is Christ's flock, and they who minister to it are Christ's under-shepherds. *The Holy Ghost,* St Paul says, *set them* as *overseers,* overlookers, guardians, *in* this flock. They are in it, before they are over it. They are themselves a part of the flock; and their own safety depends, even like that of any other member of it, upon their being themselves faithful, docile, tractable followers of the one Divine Shepherd. While they are so, they may regard themselves as set where they are by the Holy Ghost Himself. His working within them stirred the desire for this ministry; and His grace, pledged to them over again at their Ordination, qualified, and qualifies them daily, for its discharge,

Their office, as here described, is that of

feeding, or more exactly, *shepherding, the Church of God;* God's congregation, God's assembly, gathered, in any place, by the call of the Gospel, to hear, to worship, and to obey. *To shepherd the Church of God:* to guide them to the right pasture, and also to lead the way; to be to them, both by word and by example, both by life and by counsel, counsel public and private, stated and occasional, their helpers and their encouragers in *the right way that leadeth to eternal life.*

The Church of God, which He purchased by means of His own blood. Some read here, *the Church of the Lord;* afraid, perhaps, of the unwonted strength of the expression, which speaks of *God* as *purchasing the Church with His own blood.* We are not left to a single phrase or two in the Bible, to prove the glory and greatness of our Saviour, as being Very God no less truly than Very Man: we will not cling to any doubtful or ill-supported authority for the sake of propping up a doctrine which wants no such ambiguous aid: what Christ is, in His proper Divinity, we know, not from two or three passages, but from all parts, of God's Word: and if *the Lord* rather than *God* be the correct reading here, we will close

with it without a misgiving. If, however, it be the case—as many thoughtful and learned men believe—that our Version is right; that it does stand in the original *the Church of God;* then we thank God for it as one added bulwark of *the faith once for all delivered to the saints;* we *thank God,* I say, for it, *and* we *take courage!*

Gather up, before we pass on, the brief yet weighty topics of this one verse. (1) *Take heed,* so the elders or pastors of Ephesus are solemnly charged by one who knew, *to yourselves.* (2) *Take heed to the flock: to all the flock.* (3) You are *overseers in* it. Guardians, watchmen, over Christ's flock. Yet not only *over* it: *in* it first. (4) *The Holy Ghost set you* there. (5) Your business is to do for the Church what a shepherd does for his flock: to guide and to lead, to feed and to water, to watch and to protect. (6) This flock of Christ is also *God's Church:* and God Himself *purchased* that Church *with His own blood.* If this one verse were engraven on the heart of each minister, high and low, young and old, in our own Church of England, what would it not effect in the advancement of God's kingdom below?

There follows a serious warning as to ap-

proaching corruptions of the true faith. *I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you,* find their way into your office and ministry, *not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.* How soon and how gravely these prognostications of evil were fulfilled, the Epistles addressed by St Paul to Timothy at Ephesus, the Epistles of St John written probably from Ephesus, and the address of our Lord Himself to the Church of Ephesus in the Revelation of St John, bear too full and too sad a testimony. It is a terrible thing when the dangers of any Church arise from within it; when, in addition to the ordinary perils of Christian faith and Christian practice in a world still too much *lying in wickedness,* any of the Church's own teachers become unfaithful to their high trust, and help to shake the foundations of that building which they ought to be evermore adorning and strengthening. Such was the misfortune of the Church of Ephesus: is it in any sense our own?

Therefore watch. If from within, as well as from without, such dangers as these are

imminent, it well becomes the pastors of the flock to be ever diligent and ever wakeful. Remember, St Paul says to them, my example. *Remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.* There must be something serious in life, and something formidable in eternity, if this kind of perpetual, personal, sorrowful warning was judged necessary or reasonable by St Paul!

'And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified.

There are times when we feel that nothing can support, and nothing help, and nothing strengthen or soothe, but the one thought of God Himself as a near, an ever-present, an Almighty, and an ever-gracious Friend. *I commend you to God.* I place you in God's hands. Words soon spoken, but how full of meaning at certain times! Times of great anxiety, when man has tried all, and failed; times of extreme peril, when life or fortune hangs on a thread; times of intense sorrow, when *the iron enters into the* very *soul*, and the voice of the earthly comforter sounds in our ear like an imperti-

nence and a mockery; times, most of all, of bitter parting, when the long-tried pastor must leave his flock for ever, or when the father or the mother of a family lies on the bed of death, and sees around it a number of little children who must learn henceforth to tread the path of life and face the storms of life all alone. Then indeed the Apostle's words, *And now I commend you to God,* have a force and a reality absolutely all-sustaining.

'*To God, and to the word of His grace.* It is not a vague trust which is thus exercised. God has spoken; spoken a word of favour and blessing to His sinful and helpless children. *I commend you to God and to the word of His grace:* that is, to God who has made a promise; to God who *will have all men to be saved;* to God who sent His Son into the world to save sinners; to God who promises His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him. He is *able to build you up:* able to raise upon the good foundation the good superstructure: able at last *to give you an inheritance among all those whom He has* first *consecrated* and *sanctified.*

Such, he says, are my deepest, my truest, heart's desires. I have no selfish, no worldly aims. *Silver or gold or apparel of no man*

did I covet. Ye yourselves know that to my wants, and to those who were with me, these hands ministered. I showed you all things, or rather, *In all things I gave you a pattern,* the pattern of my own example, *how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak,* to help them that are in need, *and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how that He Himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. Blessed is it rather to give than to receive.*

And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down with them all, and prayed. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him; sorrowing most of all for the word which he had spoken, that they would behold his face no more. And they escorted him to the ship.

Could any last words be more deeply impressive? Could any parting charge leave a more indelible mark upon heart and life, than this which sent back the elders of Ephesus to a life of responsibility and of self-sacrifice with the words of Christ ringing in their ears, *It is a more blessed thing to give than to receive?*

St John says at the very end of his Gospel with reference to the works of Jesus on

earth—and has not the same saying a reference also to His words?—that, if all had been written down, *the world could not have contained the books that should be written.* Enough was written, to record the great facts, to fix the leading doctrines, to indicate the main features of the Saviour's character: enough was written, to prevent the Church from being the sport of an oral tradition, necessarily losing year by year something of its precision, and encumbered year by year with more, and more yet, of human and fanciful and at last erroneous accretion: enough to inform, enough to enlighten, enough to guard and to warn and to guide: not enough to exhaust the Divine storehouse of the deeds and words, the incidents of the life and the utterances of the mind, of the Lord Jesus Christ as He dwelt and walked below.

Now the text gives us an example of these unrecorded sayings. You will not find it in the Gospels. It was one of those maxims of truth and wisdom, which our Lord's immediate followers had treasured up from His lips. Who can doubt that James and John, that Philip and Peter, had many such reminiscences of those three years of converse and companion-

ship? Here is one, nowhere else recorded in Scripture, yet current doubtless everywhere in the Churches as the expression of the Saviour's mind, and the summary of His Divine example, *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

We might easily imagine to ourselves occasions on which these words may have dropped from His lips. They may have checked the entreaties of His disciples that He would for once think more of Himself and less of others. They may have answered some kind and friendly remonstrance when He turned aside from an untasted meal to attend to the sorrows and sicknesses which ever thronged the doors within which He rested. They may have explained on any occasion the secret of His perpetual self-sacrifice; of His multiplying food for famishing crowds, while He refused to turn one stone into bread for His own sustenance; of His turning aside from all solicitations of personal want or weariness, so long as there was within reach but one sufferer whom He could relieve, one mourner to be comforted, or one sinner to be reclaimed or saved. At any such moment, more than once (it may be) on such occasions, may have been heard these

words from the lips of the Lord Jesus, *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

Were they not indeed the key to His whole life? Was not this the secret of His humiliation? The superior blessedness of giving above receiving, was it not this which made Him lay aside His glory, and come down to be the Minister of the sinful, and the Saviour of the lost? And when He had thus humbled Himself, did not the same principle originate every act and prompt every motion? *It is more blessed to give than to receive:* therefore did He take upon Himself the condition of the poor man, the lonely, and the despised, not that of the rich, the prosperous, and the powerful. *It is more blessed to give than to receive:* therefore did He, the Lord of all, submit to a life in which He *had not where to lay His head;* no domestic love in which to find solace, no public pomp or show in which to display His greatness. *It is more blessed to give than to receive:* therefore did He make Himself the servant of all, *coming not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His* very *life a ransom for many.*

How bright a light does this one expression throw upon the whole character of Jesus

Christ! There have been great men upon earth who left behind them on record but one single saying; one maxim of sententious wisdom, which the world took up and made its own for ever. Suppose that our Lord Jesus Christ had been personally known to later generations but by this one brief sentence? Would it have been possible to repress the admiration which every noble and generous heart must have felt for Him? Should we not all have framed to ourselves instinctively some conception of that character which thus expressed itself, of that life which this principle must have moulded? What an intuition must He have possessed, who thus spake, into the real secret of greatness, the true dignity of man, and the essential characteristic of God!

More blessed to give than to receive? More blessed to be communicating than participating? more blessed to be constantly becoming poor, than to be perpetually growing rich? more blessed to face labour and privation and suffering, than to live in a luxurious home, surrounded by loved and loving faces, and with much good laid up in sure prospect for many years? More blessed, asks the selfish old man, *to have an empty coffer than a full one? More blessed,*

asks the young man of pleasure, *to admit another than myself to the desired scene of gaiety? More blessed,* asks the calculating man of business, the successful statesman, or the self-contained and self-engrossed student, *to stand aside and let others pass me in the race of gain or fame or knowledge, than to reap the fruit of my own skill or perseverance or genius, in a life of what is to me enjoyment, and perhaps an immortality of repute and honour? Nay, let me hear that, however painful, the loss must be submitted to; that, though insufferable to flesh and blood, it is a condition of the kingdom; that, though every step in such a life must be a step of degradation and a step of distress, yet it must be taken, and repeated, and re-repeated, till at last painful use shall become (if it ever can become) a second nature: speak thus, and I can understand you: but say not that there is any happiness, any blessedness, in such a life of mortification: say not, for it is unreal language to say, that it can ever be more blessed to give than to receive.* Such, my friends, is ever the true feeling of a fallen and unrenewed nature: there was an inspiration in the words before us; and till He who spake also inspires, we shall hear them still

and read them as exaggerated or unmeaning words.

And yet if *more blessed* means in other words, more Divine, more Godlike, is not the saying at once proved true? God, who possesses all things, cannot receive: God, who upholds all things, is ever giving. To receive is to be a creature: to give is, in whatever measure it is realized, to be so far a *partaker of the Divine Nature.*

We will illustrate the saying in one or two particulars.

1. I take the commonest and most obvious of all applications. Money. Money has many uses. It purchases many pleasures. It has in itself many powers. With limitations, it can even buy knowledge. It is allowed sometimes to buy rank. It can always command, from some quarters, submission and subservience. If it cannot buy love, it can buy some substitutes and many counterfeits of it. Therefore it is idle to say that money is not an advantage. The rich man is better off than the poor man. Not happier, necessarily; certainly not better: but better off; more fortunate; speaking of this life only. Now can we possibly say of money, these being its advan-

tages, that *it is more blessed to give than to receive?* Few men seem to find it so. What an eagerness is there to get money anyhow! What a pleasure in finding it multiply! What an cagerness to lay by, to invest, to get good interest, to have it out on good security! What a desire, in some bosoms, to die rich; though they know that they cannot take it with them, and though they have none perhaps to leave it to! At last it becomes a passion. Scraping, and hoarding, and counting, and bequeathing, it grows at last into a business, and into an appetite, and into a disease. Every gain is a joy, a happiness, a blessedness. It is too late perhaps then to gain an audience for the Divine saying, *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

But let us try it betimes. Is there nothing in human nature which responds to it? I can fancy a very common man—a man, I mean, quite of average virtue—saying, *My chief pleasure in money is in paying it away. I rejoice in going round among my tradesmen, and feeling that I owe no man anything. I have a positive pleasure in wiping out a debt; in thinking that that man, who has served me, is the better for me; that that family derives (in part) its*

comfort from my custom: yes, I enjoy paying away at least as much as receiving. This is a poor and faint image of the glorious principle of the text: but it is well to show that Christianity is not all transcendental, *far above out of our sight,* but that it seizes upon something which is in all of us till we are utterly hardened, and raises it into a region where approval at least and admiration may follow it.

But I do not believe that the hearts of this congregation, or indeed of any congregation, will ever be changed into the love of giving, save by the entrance into them of the light of the Gospel, and of the Spirit of Christ. Then they will. When once the world is seen as it is, and heaven as it is; when once we perceive that we *are not our own,* but *bought with a price;* when once the example of Christ, who left heaven for us, and the faith of Christ, who opened heaven to us, are felt by us as real motives; then we shall be *changed into the same image from glory to glory;* we shall value the wealth of this world chiefly for its power of relieving distress, healing disease, and spreading the Gospel; we shall find that, with reference to this, the lowest yet withal

the most tangible of all its applications, the Saviour's saying is verified, *It is more blessed to give than to receive. Do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest; for He is kind to the unthankful and to the evil.*

2. I pass from the basest to the highest of possessions; from money to love. There are those amongst us whose nature is athirst for love. Life is a wilderness to them without love. If there were but one person who loved them with a disinterested and devoted affection, they feel that they should be happy. And it comes not. They are still lonely, still disconsolate, still restless, because still unloved. Or, to change the supposition, they have love, but it is not *the* love; the love which they desire, and for which they would give all. Every one loves them, except the one person. These are among the acutest of life's sorrows: they are no fancies, they are no sentimentalisms; they are the realities of life. We cannot but think that our Saviour has a word, has a voice, for these. We cannot but think that the text speaks to them, and says, Little as you may think it, *it is more blessed* in this respect,

to give than to receive; more blessed to love than even to be loved. Give freely of your affection, and look not for a return. Even thus did Christ. *He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.* He loved the world, and the world hated Him. It is more blessed, because it is more Godlike, to love than to be loved. To be loved is human: to love is Divine. To love, and therefore to do good; to love, and therefore to be willing to *spend and be spent, though the more abundantly I love, the less I be loved;* to love, and therefore to devote yourself, time and strength, patience and self-denial, life and death, to the service of another, *hoping,* if so it be, *for nothing again;* this is what Christ did: this is what the Master endured: and the *disciple is not greater than his Lord.*

One thing you can say even now, if you be His; that you would not exchange the lot of the unloved for the lot of the unloving. You would not part with the power to love; with that warm heart, that generous impulse, that spontaneous, unbought, uncalculating affection; even for the sake of being free from its disappointments, free from its aching voids or its rough repulses.

Purify and refine your affection, more and more, by every argument and every motive of the Gospel; wash out of it all earthly stains, burn out of it all human corruptions: and then cherish it, use it, give it, yea, lavish it: give as your Saviour gave, without a bargain, and without an expectation, and without a repining, and without one backward look: and in the end you shall be able to echo His words, as well as to remember and to live by them, *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

May He who said the words, also make them profitable! They point to a way of life which is not after the manner of men; a life of onward striving and of upward looking; a life of which the beginning alone is here, a life of which the consummation and the crown is hereafter.

Who is amongst us, capable of such aspirations? Who is amongst us, willing to wait, and tolerant of postponement? Who is amongst us, satisfied with unseen treasures, and ready to give largely for a remote, an eternal recompence? To him, to her, is that call sent, which is not for the unbelieving and the worldly, but for those who would follow Paul even as he followed Christ,

REMEMBER THE WORDS OF THE LORD JESUS, HOW HE SAID, IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE.

LECTURE X.

COURAGE AND SUBMISSION.

ACTS XXI. 13, 14.

Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

LET us look into these words.

We have passed from Ephesus to Cæsarea.

The parting from Ephesus, or rather from Miletus, had been a sad one.

A Christian, my friends, does not lose feeling, he rather gains feeling, in becoming so. He has all his old feelings, rather sharpened than blunted by the change. He feels slights

from those he loves, quite as sensitively; he has the same delight in companionship, the same shrinking from separation, which were his before: nay, in all these things, there is an edge and a life which there was not before: in proportion as self has passed away, a new man has been gradually forming in him: and that new man is all love; love first to God, love then for God's sake to man.

Men do not always remember this in judging a Christian. They do not see the inward struggle by which he keeps down the rising retort or the rebellious resentment: they do not witness the secret conflict by which alone he can *keep himself from idols*, nor yet the prayer and watching by which he acquires that self-mastery which the world (even of his friends) calls coldness. The feeling itself is still there; the feeling of natural affection, which makes loneliness still formidable, and parting still difficult.

St Paul was as natural as he was spiritual.

Twice in this paragraph we read of painful partings; partings as of a brother from brothers; nay, as of a mother resigning a beloved son to exile or to the grave.

The sea-shore at Miletus, and then the sea-

shore at Tyre, was wet with tears: Christian tears; tears of intense feeling, of bitter grief, yet withal of resignation and of submission too.

This was over now. The voyage had been resumed from Miletus: Coos, with its vineyards and its purple; Rhodes, with its historic associations (past or future) and its already ruined Colossus; then the Lycian Patara, town and port and oracle of Apollo; had each in turn been reached in safety: then a tranquil and rapid run across the open sea, leaving Cyprus on the left; and Tyre, dethroned but not yet desolated, is made a seven days' resting-place in Christian converse with its disciples.

Already in his address to the Ephesian elders, St Paul had spoken of *the Holy Ghost witnessing in every city that bonds and afflictions awaited him.* At Tyre, the disciples, speaking in the Spirit—by revelation from above—repeat this prediction. They *said to Paul through the Spirit that he should not go up to Jerusalem.* The prediction was of the Spirit, the prohibition was their own. Or, if not their own, it was overruled in St Paul by a stronger intuition of duty; by a voice within, saying, *This is the way, walk thou in it,* though it be

to thee, as it will be, a path of danger, suffering, and bonds. *The spirits of the prophets,* St Paul himself says, *are subject unto the prophets.* That which they spake in the Spirit he could yet judge in the Spirit, and their revelation must at last be tried and tested by his own.

How often in difficult decisions do we see the appropriateness of that comforting and most true saying, *God has many bests!* It might not have been wrong for St Paul to turn back; to desist from his cherished purpose of visiting Jerusalem: that had been the counsel of prudence, and zeal itself might not have disowned it. But a mightier power within pressed upon him the alternative. The nobler and the bolder and (in the end) the wiser determination was to go forward. In the Spirit he overruled the Spirit, and God was with him in doing so.

Learn from this remarkable example, my friends, the duty of comparing Scripture with Scripture, Spirit with Spirit, voice with voice. God never so speaks as to overbear exertion. God never so speaks as to supersede judgment. If one voice of God seems to say this, see whether perhaps another voice does not say that: then lay them together; and by prayer

and counsel at last judge between them, and act!

Thus then there was to be a second comfortless parting. The seven days were ended, at Tyre as at Troas: then the ship, waiting not an Apostle's convenience but only the *unlading of her burden,* is to pursue its course southwards: wind and tide wait not: the disciples of Tyre, *with wives and children*—that the last view of the holy man might be impressed even upon their little ones—escort him and his companions out of the city; and then on the bare sea-beach they all kneel and pray. A late traveller has almost sketched the spot for us. He speaks of *an open space* still to be seen on *the western shore* of Tyre, *between the houses and the sea,* where may still be *enjoyed, in all its luxury, the cool sea breeze, and the dashing of the surge upon the rocky shore.* That perhaps was the oratory of the parting friends: there they took leave of one another; the missionaries to *take ship,* the residents to *return home again.* These are among the touches of real life, which make the Acts of the Apostles a picture of the true human Church for ever.

Landing at the next port, Ptolemais or Acre—so famous in English story, both in the

wars of the Crusaders, and in a struggle more recent and more gigantic still—St Paul and his company went on, probably by land, a distance of some thirty or forty miles, to the great city of Cæsarea.

Cæsarea was a magnificent but a shortlived city. Its greatness was due to king Herod, who rebuilt it in remarkable splendour, in the short period of twelve years, as a memorial of his gratitude to the then Cæsar. Under him it became, for all civil and military purposes, the capital of Palestine. We have heard of it as the abode of the centurion Cornelius. In that city the gates of the kingdom were first flung open to us Gentiles. Here the younger Herod, in the very amphitheatre of his father's city, was stricken by the Angel *because he gave not God the glory.* We shall read of Cæsarea again in St Paul's onward history. Here he was tried before Felix: here he recounted the tale of his life before Festus and Agrippa: here for two years he was imprisoned: hence he sailed in bonds, for shipwreck, and for Rome. Now, and for centuries past, Cæsarea is not. An old castle marks its site. Its ruins spread around: a few vessels of the country still water there: but the high road itself has

deserted it, and few travellers turn aside to see what was once so great and must ever for Christians be so sacred. The period of Cæsarea's grandeur is almost exactly bounded by the limits of the sacred story.

It was not with Cornelius that St Paul stayed on this occasion in Cæsarea. In the changes and chances of a soldier's life, Cornelius may have been ordered elsewhere: we know not. But there was a remarkable person to receive him; *Philip the Evangelist, who was one of the seven.* The reference is obviously to him of whom we read in the 6th chapter as one of the seven persons chosen to assist the Apostles in the daily ministration; and again in the 8th chapter—after being for the time lost in the greater fame of Stephen—as the Evangelist of Samaria itself, and as executing a more deeply affecting ministry to the Ethiopian nobleman. We owe, for all time, to this Philip, that interpretation of the 53rd chapter of the prophet Isaiah, which may God give grace to His Church ever to believe and ever to preach!

You will remember that at the close of that narrative Philip is left where we now find him. *Passing through he preached in all the*

cities, till he came to Cæsarea. Whether he remained there at that time, we know not. Whether he exercised a diligent ministry in the towns and villages of Palestine, only making Cæsarea his head-quarters, we know not. Whether his office was a permanent or a temporary one; whether in other words the Ordination described in the 6th chapter was the establishment of an order of ministry, or only an expedient, sanctioned by Divine wisdom, for the time then present; all this we know not. Here, at all events, we find him, years later, occupying a house in Cæsarea—*we entered into the house of Philip the Evangelist*—and surrounded by a family. It is especially mentioned, though without any incident to be explained by it, that Philip had four virgin daughters endowed with the gift of prophecy. Thus was literally fulfilled the saying of the prophet Joel, *It shall come to pass in the last days, that I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh;* no longer upon a favoured few, in whose light alone others can see light, but upon persons of every age and rank and name; *and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.*

New omens of danger followed. Agabus,

that Prophet of whom we read in the 11th chapter as predicting the famine, now arrived in Cæsarea from Jerusalem, and by a speaking sign intimated to St Paul that he should not only be imprisoned by the Jews, but (which was perhaps a new feature in the case) *delivered* by them, like his Master, *into the hands of Gentiles.* So express a declaration of coming trouble, could not but aggravate the earnestness of all who loved him, to prevent his prosecuting his journey. *When we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.* The text gives us first St Paul's answer, and then the pious acquiescence of the disciples in a sorrow which they foresaw but could not prevent.

Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? The original text is clearer. *What do ye weeping and breaking my heart?* What are you about, in thus afflicting me by your entreaties and your tears? *For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when (since) he would not be persuaded, we ceased,* we held our peace, *after saying* this only, *The will of the Lord be done.*

Let not the twofold example be lost upon

us: (1) the example of his courage, (2) the example of their submission.

1. Courage is, in some senses, a natural gift. I do not suppose that a man by any effort of the will can make himself out of a constitutionally timid a physically brave man. Men differ beyond limit in their sensibility to pain. Great men—men whose career was singularly bold as politicians or statesmen—have been found incapable of bearing an operation: they have died with a wound unprobed. It was not cowardice: it was a nervous temperament of singular sensibility. There have been soldiers who lacked physical courage: they have had to lash themselves to a battle by the bare sense of duty or by the less noble yet not contemptible dread of disgrace. We ought to respect tenfold a man who has triumphed over such obstacles. He may have mistaken his calling: but that man's bravery was worth all the hardihood of those who knew what it cost and could laugh at him. If there be a choice, I respect even more the man who recanted his true creed to avoid the fire, and then in the death which at last he faced held his right hand separately in the flame as though to punish its weakness,

than the readier and more instant resolution of his brave fellow-martyrs, who at once sealed their faith with their blood and *rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame* for truth.

Courage in a physical sense is a gift. I say not that even in this sense it may not be gained, or almost gained, by resolute training. But to the very end men must differ, and differ widely, in the facility or the difficulty of endurance. God gives, and God gives not: *what hast thou*, the bravest of us, *which thou didst not receive?*

But I do not know that St Paul's courage was of this nature. The few hints which reach us seem rather to point an opposite way. Was he not describing some real characteristic, when he wrote to the Corinthians, *I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling?* I picture him to myself as of a feeble rather than a herculean frame; as a man whom men would call timid, nervous, shrinking, sensitive, rather than as one who overawed by his presence or struck terror by his speech. And yet when was ever a courage more courageous? When did St Paul ever shrink from danger? When did he ever avoid a place because it was full of

enemies? When did he ever decline a duty, whether of word or action, because it might bring risk to position or liberty, to life or limb? What a catalogue is that which he gives us of physical endurances in the 11th chapter of the 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians! *Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one: thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep: in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.* If St Paul was not made for courage, at least he had learned it.

And how learned it? The secret is told in a few words of the text.

We have all heard of the strength which a weak woman will put forth in saving a loved child from flood or fire; of the bravery with which a wife will encounter perils for a husband, when his life is threatened or his honour jeopardied. Such examples are not instances

of changes of character: but they show the force of circumstances in raising character above its common level. Yet suppose now that this transforming cause were constant in its operation: would that love which has wrought wonders under sudden impulse be less powerful, think you, if the demand upon it were repeated, were perpetual? Love is stronger than death, stronger than the fear of death, stronger than the present sense of any pain however depressing or however agonizing. Just such was that motive which St Paul here indicates—that motive of which his life was the result—when he speaks of being ready to be bound and ready to die *for the name of the Lord Jesus. The love of Christ constrained him.* Above the pain of any isolation, of any torture, of any execution, towered high aloft the name, that is, the revelation, the character, the person, of Him who while he was yet a sinner had died for him and risen; of Him who had once spoken to him from heaven, and taken him by an act of free compassion for His messenger and His witness. It was this which raised him out of himself, and made it easier to him to suffer, easier (if need be) even to die, than once to forget or forsake or deny the Person who was dearer to

him than the very life itself. This was the spring of Paul's courage; and it carried him through the toils and pains and sorrows of a life which he could only describe, in his own strong way, as a daily death.

There must be something in a Gospel which can thus work: something, let me rather say, in a Saviour who can thus perfect strength in weakness.

We are not called, in these calm easy days, to feats of bodily courage in that Saviour's service. It is well. We might find ourselves all unequal to such enterprises. I know not where there is to be found amongst us one equal to an Apostle's life or a martyr's death. The courage to which we are called is known rather as a moral courage. It is that independence, of judgment and action, which befits one who must stand at last alone to give account of himself to God. It is the power to avow now what we shall feel then; to be now what we shall wish to have been then. And where is it? Where, amongst us, is that ability to stand alone, to face (if it be necessary) an adverse world, in the name and for the love of the Lord Jesus? Alas! in this aspect the brave are cowards, the strong weak, and the

great little. We had rather *follow a multitude to do evil,* than bear a taunting reproach or a disdainful smile. Life therefore is a perpetual compromise, and death a desperate plunge. Timid even more than we are wicked: cowardly, the best of us, where we would be brave!

2. There was a decision in the tone, which at last silenced importunity. *When he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.* Courage wrought resignation. The Apostle was brave, and therefore the disciples were submissive.

The will of the Lord, they said, *be done.*

The words might be read either as a prayer or as an acquiescence. And it is only they who can use them as the one, who can rightly utter them as the other.

It is a very common ejaculation, when all efforts are vain, *God's will be done.* So speaks the mourner, when all hope of restoration has fled from the bed of sickness. So speaks the bankrupt, when his last card is played, and the game has gone against him. So speaks the convicted criminal, when sin is found out, and the fabric of proof is at last complete against him.

But in all these cases *God's will be done* is not a prayer at all. It is the last cry of human weakness when it has vainly entered the lists against the Lord of Sabaoth. It means only, *Woe is me! for I am undone.* The thing formed has risen against its Maker, and the struggle has been too sore for it. We learn at last to suspect the words. They so often express, not the bending, but the crushing, of the self-will under the resistless will of God.

Therefore let us try to *pray* the words. We have them in the Lord's Prayer. *Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.* Who wishes that? Who honestly wishes that God's will should be entirely done below? done with him, done in him, and done by him, even him himself? *The same is a perfect man. What? No place left for that crooked practice, for that perverse temper, for that darling lust? No room at all upon earth for that pastime which I so much enjoyed, for that sin which I so much loved? No: I did not mean that: I did not quite wish that!* Therefore *out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant.* Thine own prayer—that prayer which

thou hast said ten times this one day—condemns thee and finds thee out.'

Resignation is no virtue except so far as it is the product of obedience. *Add,* St Peter says, *to temperance patience.* Be God's first in act: then shalt thou be His too in suffering.

(1) Some of us have of late broken quite loose from God. We have taken his substance—His air and light, His gifts of reason and speech, His blessings of health and enjoyment—and wasted them, like the prodigal, in riotous or at least in careless living. This week has been, to many, a lost week for the soul. And some have been cut off in it; miserably, horribly, in their sins. We survive. God has been merciful, *not willing that we should perish.* Bethink yourselves tonight of the example of that holy man who, after days of feasting and excitement, *rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt-offerings* for all the revellers; saying, *It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.* Come back to God this night, ye wanderers, and pray Him for His Son's sake to grant you repentance and to grant you life! Try to pray the words, from the heart, *Thy will, O God, be done!*

(2) Others have done so. They have made sacrifices—I know it—this last week for conscience sake. They could not do something in faith: and without faith they knew that it would have been sin. They have foregone some profit: they might have been richer tonight, by ten pounds or twenty, than they are. I feel for them: and yet I envy them. They *are* the richer: richer in heaven's goods, if not in earth's; richer for eternity, if not for time. They are more *men* for it: strengthened in courage; more erect, more vigorous, for the self-denial. May God bless them, and show them the light of His countenance! *Yet not unto us, not unto us, but unto Thy name give the praise!* They have tried to do God's will: rightly or wrongly, they have so understood it, and therefore they have so done. Others judged differently; and to their own Master they also stand or fall. This we know, that no man ever yet left house or lands, no man ever yet sacrificed a gain or bore a loss, no man ever yet endured a cross or despised a shame, honestly and simply for Christ's sake and the Gospel's, *but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time*—peace, and strength, and a good conscience, and a brighter hope,

and a nobler courage—*and in the world to come eternal life,* through His merits who *to this end both died and rose and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living!*

LECTURE XI.

CHRISTIAN PRUDENCE.

ACTS XXIII. 6.

But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

THERE was on record a charge given by the Lord Himself; a charge already (when these words were spoken) some thirty years old, but still fresh and young in the power of the Divine life; *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.* And there was a promise too, appended to that rule of conduct.

But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. I purpose to show you this evening, in a few brief examples, how this charge was obeyed, and how this promise was fulfilled, in the case of St Paul.

When we last drew our subject from this interesting and instructive Book of Holy Scripture, we dwelt upon St Paul's courage. *What mean ye,* he said to his distressed friends, as they stood around him, entreating him to spare himself from the foreseen and foretold dangers of an intended journey, *What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.* And they themselves, finding that he would not be persuaded, and constrained to admire the boldness and constancy of their beloved leader, even while they trembled at its consequences for him, at last abandoned their fruitless remonstrances, and said, with a submission scarcely less admirable than his heroism, *The will of the Lord be done.* Tonight our

subject is of a different, I had almost said, of an opposite, kind. We are to read of St Paul's prudence, of his discretion in avoiding idle risks, of his skill in extricating himself from hostile snares. *Be ye wise as serpents*, was the charge which he remembered: *it shall be given you*, in the hour of peril, *what ye shall speak*, was the promise pleaded and fulfilled.

You will perceive by the place of the text, that I propose to you this evening a very rapid survey. From the middle of the 21st chapter to the end of the 23rd is the field from which our topics are to be chosen.

St Paul made the journey on which he had resolved. From Cæsarea, where we left him, to Jerusalem, he travelled unmolested. He had with him the proceeds of that collection which he had everywhere been making for the poor Christians at Jerusalem. He was kindly received, on the night of his arrival, by the brethren whom he visited. On the next day a more public reception awaited him. All the elders of the Church, under the presidency of St James the resident Apostle, came together to hear his report of his eventful ministry among the Gentiles. Their interest was lively, and their thankfulness hearty. But

they foresaw that danger out of which was to spring captivity and exile. Among the Christian converts were *thousands of Jews.* Though believers in Christ, they were also *zealous of the law.* They could not take in the idea of its abrogation. *Christ the end of the law*—its terminus and its termination—was a truth as yet dimly seen. A salvation aided by Christ, a salvation eked out by Christ, they could understand: but that salvation must be still, they thought, as of old, a salvation earned by human obedience to a law given by Moses. Now they were right in supposing that this was not St Paul's doctrine. He always said that salvation must be all of Christ, or none of Christ. Grace, or debt; human merit, or Divine grace; one or other, not both. Salvation is too great a thing to be a thing of shreds and patches; here a stripe of merit and there a daub of grace. They were right in supposing that St Paul preached the abolition of the Law, so far as it could avail for man's salvation. But they were wrong in supposing that he preached the abrogation of the Law for Jews, so far as its outward observance was concerned. A Jew might be a Jew still; might still observe the Law, still practise its circumcision,

keep its feasts, and bind himself (if he chose) by its vows. He must not indeed trust in these things; but neither need he abjure them. A Jew might be a Jew still, and yet be saved through Christ: a Gentile must not become a Jew, or he is *fallen from grace.*

The assembled elders, knowing what St Paul was and was not, and aware too of this general misconception of his teaching, recommended to him the following expedient. Let him show, by a practical proof, that he did not object to a Jew being a Jew still. There were four men, Jewish Christians, at that moment in Jerusalem, bound by a Nazarite's vow. That vow, made commonly at a time of personal danger by land or sea, by disease or accident, bound the person undertaking it to abstain from wine and to let his hair grow uncut for a certain period, at the end of which particular sacrifices were to be offered, which were not always within the command of a poor man's purse. It was by no means unusual for richer men to bear the expence of those sacrifices in behalf of the poor. The Christian elders recommend St Paul to do this; to include himself for a few days in the Nazarite's vow of these four Jewish Christians,

and then to pay the cost of the prescribed offerings for all. *Be at charges with them,* the 24th verse says, *that they may shave their heads:* that is, bear the charge, pay the expence, of those sacrifices which must be offered before they can rid themselves of their vow and cut the hair of their heads in sign of its termination. The advice was friendly, and St Paul followed it. He who had said in one of his letters, *To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews,* acted now upon that principle. He had never made it a principle of doctrine that Jews should abandon their ceremonial Law: *he* was a Jew: therefore he might perform one of those ceremonies with a safe conscience, if by so doing he might conciliate his countrymen, and thus by God's grace *save some.*

In things indifferent, my brethren, the motive is everything: and we know his.

The expedient thus adopted was partially successful. For seven days he showed himself in the temple-courts, in the company of the four Nazarites, awaiting the moment of the proper offering. That moment was almost come, when a furious tumult was roused against him by some Jews who had come up from the

province of Asia to be present at the feast of Pentecost. They declared that an Ephesian whom they knew by sight, Trophimus by name, one of St Paul's *companions in travel*, had been brought by him, though a Gentile, into that part of the temple-precincts which was accessible only to Jews. On this pretext, probably false as well as futile, the whole of that excitable and fickle population threw itself upon St Paul; dragged him out of the court of the Israelites, while the great gates of that court were closed after him by the Levites; and prepared to take his life, either by stoning, or by a more summary process of throwing him from the precipice of the temple. At this moment the Roman officer, commanding from his tower of Antonia every occurrence within the sacred courts below, brought down his armed force, stopped the tumult, and took forcible possession of the person of the Apostle. Unable to ascertain the facts from the incoherent answers of the crowd, he ordered the prisoner to be carried up into the fortress, which communicated by a staircase with the cloisters of the temple. On those stairs, forced upwards by the pressure of the angry multitude, he was permitted at length by the chief captain to address a few words of

explanation and remonstrance to the people below. To the surprise of the chief captain, who had imagined him an Egyptian outlaw, he had addressed himself to him in Greek: now to his countrymen he speaks in their own loved and sacred tongue, and tells them, at first amidst *a great silence,* the narrative of his youth and of his change.

By birth a Jew; brought up here, in their own holy city, amongst all the associations of Judaism; taught by their own most celebrated master, the wise and learned Gamaliel; zealous for their law like any of them; nay more, an ardent persecutor of Christians even to the death; commissioned by the Sanhedrin to carry their persecution even to strange cities; surely they might listen to him? surely they might believe that all his prepossessions, all his prejudices, all his early and deeply rooted principles, pointed once in a direction entirely their own, and, if changed, could have been changed only by some resistless force of reason, of which, if they will hear him to the end, he will give them the account?

He tells them of his conversion: of that sudden arrest, at noontime, near Damascus; that supernatural light, that articulate voice,

that calm remonstrance, that authoritative direction; then that gracious message, sent by one of themselves—*Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there*—which had restored him to sight, summoned him to Baptism, and brought him back to this same city a witness of *the faith which once he destroyed.*

Thus far he had been listened to, if not with approval, yet in silence. It was not till, in recounting a subsequent communication made to him in Jerusalem by his new, his Divine Master, he reached the offensive, the hateful name *Gentile,* that the storm broke forth anew, and the threatening cries from below constrained the Roman commander to hurry his removal into the fortress which was to be his prison. Bewildered and baffled by the conflicting accounts of him, the chief captain now resorted to that cruel expedient of the Roman law, an examination by torture. St Paul was already bound, for the application of the torturer's lash, when the mention of his Roman citizenship alarmed the authorities, and wrought an instant change in his condition and prospects.

The chief captain now desires to obtain a clearer insight into his prisoner's case, by sub-

jecting him to a formal trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin. After a night passed in the fortress, St Paul stands before the high priest and elders. And here, after one earnest gaze upon the countenances of his judges, he opens his defence with the serious assertion of his entire conscientiousness. From his youth till this day he has lived in obedience to conscience. A solemn and an instructive word for us! Which of us can say that which St Paul declares of himself even with reference to his days of darkness and error? Irritated by this calm and dauntless bearing of one whom he has prejudged as a heretic and a criminal, the high priest *commanded those that stood by to smite him on the mouth.* And St Paul, as if to show us that, with many a bright, we have but one perfect example, is betrayed into a retort, which, however just, stands in marked contrast with the immovable silence (under the like provocation) of his Divine Master, and for which afterwards he himself apologizes, whatever be the exact import of those difficult words, *I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest* (whether an infirmity of sight had betrayed him into mistaking the person; or whether *I wist not* means *I did not reflect, I did not consider, I did not remember,* as I ought

to have done, *that he was the high priest*), with the recitation of the words of the Law itself, *It is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.*

It is at this point that the text occurs. Perceiving himself to be standing before a prejudiced tribunal; one which would not be influenced by the force of truth; one to which he would vainly address the language of argument, remonstrance, or expostulation; St Paul avails himself, with consummate skill, of the notorious division of opinion on the most elementary points of doctrine among the judges themselves, and enlists on his side the approval of one half at least of his audience, by the words before read to you, *Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.* As though he had said, *What question can be so fundamental as that of a future state of being? Till you can agree upon that, why waste your strength in trying minor heresies? Settle that among yourselves, and then turn your thoughts to me.*

The effect of the words was magical. It broke up the hearing. *There arose a great cry.* The materialist Sadducee, denying alike

the resurrection of the dead and the existence of spirit, was diverted from the case before him by a prior and deeper difference with his colleague on the judgment-seat. The Pharisee, right thus far in his creed, that he held the immateriality of the soul and the resurrection of the children of Abraham, found in the prisoner an unexpected ally, and claimed him as his associate in his ancestral feud with the Sadducee. And thus, this trial, like the former, ending only in confusion and violence, the puzzled Roman must again take back his prisoner, and make out, as he can, for himself, who he is and what he has done.

But the disappointed foe has adopted a readier and more wicked stratagem. More than forty Jews bind themselves under a horrible curse to take Paul's life before they will either eat or drink. They intend to induce the chief captain to bring him once again before the council, as if to make some further investigation of his crime; and they, before he reaches the place of hearing, are ready to kill him. The plot is made known to Paul by a young relative, here only known to us, his *sister's son;* and communicated, under his direction, by the same person to the chief cap-

tain himself. The result is, a hurried night journey, under a strong armed escort, from Jerusalem to Cæsarea. There the Roman governor holds his court; and the matter must go before him. A letter from the chief captain accompanies the prisoner, explaining how much and how little Claudius Lysias has been able to ascertain concerning him. Felix reads the letter, and, after an enquiry as to the Apostle's birthplace, reserves him for the accusers' coming, and commits him for safe keeping to the prætorium of Herod. The Christian home of the Evangelist Philip, where St Paul's last visit to Cæsarea was passed in comforting communion, is exchanged now for a rougher home and a less congenial converse. With Cæsarea our sketch tonight began, and in Cæsarea it terminates.

Our last subject was courage: our present subject is prudence. Are the two qualities entirely antagonistic? Is one man courageous, and another man prudent, and no one man (unless it be St Paul himself) both at once? I trust we shall see, in the few moments which remain to us, that prudence and courage are but two sides of one character; two expressions, under varying circumstances, of the same

Christian mind; two workings, in opposite states, of the same Holy, Divine, and indwelling Spirit.

(1) You have seen St Paul taking part in a Nazarite's vow, that he might disarm the unreasoning hostility of his countrymen. (2) You have heard him putting forward in his own defence every term and every circumstance most likely to conciliate towards him the mind of his Jewish audience. (3) You have heard him availing himself of his Roman citizenship to avoid the infliction of a cruel and unjust torture. (4) And you have seen him taking advantage of the doctrinal dissensions of his judges, to make his escape from a verdict certain to have been condemning. In all these ways he showed prudence. I can fancy some critics accusing him even of finesse. I can imagine some censors calling him timid, shifty, disingenuous, evasive. Happily his whole life is before us, his whole mind disclosed, his conduct under all manner of circumstances legible as in the sunbeam. And therefore such cavils or such criticisms are not likely to damage. We know too much of St Paul to believe them. It only shows us how often we may misjudge a character by not knowing more of it: how often we may pro-

nounce a man cowardly, because we only see him (as it were) dividing a tribunal by sowing some seed of discord, or evading a penalty by pleading some accidental or technical exemption. God in His good Providence has kept us from thus judging, for lack of evidence, His good and holy servant St Paul. Now therefore, using his example, let us lay down two or three rules of Christian prudence.

1. Christian prudence has place only in things lawful. Where there is nothing wrong in doing either this or that, we may do this rather than that, because the one would be safe and the other dangerous. St Paul was a Jew; and the four men were Jews: therefore there was nothing wrong, according to his most constant and earnest principles, in their having a Nazarite's vow. But if any one of the five had been a Gentile instead of a Jewish Christian, no fear or favour would have induced St Paul to *be at charges with them.* We have an exact illustration of this, in both its parts, in St Paul's own history. Timothy, his friend and comrade, had a Jewish parent. It was optional therefore with him to be either Jew or Gentile. St Paul caused him to be circumcised before he took him as his companion.

He had always said that a Jew might keep the Law, and Timothy was a Jew by his mother's side. Uncircumcised, he would have been useless: the Jews would not have tolerated him: to gain the Jews, he must be circumcised, and no principle forbade it. Another friend and companion, Titus, was a Gentile: he had no Jewish parent: and therefore to have allowed him to be circumcised, whatever the temptation on the ground of expediency or of usefulness, would have been a dereliction of duty; a departure from the great principle of St Paul's ministry, the entire and absolute freedom of the Gentile from the yoke of the Levitical Law. St Paul, we are expressly told, would not allow Titus to be circumcised. The form of the example is obsolete; but not its spirit. There are those, my friends, among us modern Christians, who worship prudence; who do not see the difference between prudence on principle, and prudence without or against principle; whose only idea is conciliation, and who end by sacrificing everything to a sort of vague and unmeaning complaisance. Remember, it must always be wrong to do wrong, whatever be the motive: to say a wrong thing, or to do a wrong thing—to refrain from saying the

right thing, or to refrain from doing the right thing—in the hope or on the plea of winning others to you, must always be sinful, let who will be the doer, and let what will be the end proposed. Prudence has only place in things lawful. If one of you says, *I wish to gain or to retain a hold upon such a one, and therefore I will go with him to a place or into a society which I feel to be against my conscience,* that person is not exercising Christian prudence, but he is practising a sinful compromise.

2. Again, Christian prudence must be tried by its motive. It is easy to be prudent—far easier, to most natures, than to be imprudent—in religious things; easier to sit still, easier to keep silence, easier to say smooth words and to refrain from earnest reproofs, than the contrary. But the question is, Why? Why do we become *all things to all men,* in things lawful or indifferent? Is it to save ourselves trouble? Is it to avoid the reproach of being *righteous overmuch?* Is it to make ourselves popular, the friend of all men, the person whose company is liked by the careless and the sinful? Is it to gain the character of a moderate and sensible and calm-minded person; a man of good judgment; which too often means, a man of no

earnestness and no zeal? That was not St Paul's prudence. Hear his own account of it, as it is written in the 9th chapter of the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians: *Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law: to the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.* You see what a motive there was, what a noble, what an unselfish, what a divine motive, in all that St Paul did to conciliate others: it was not that they might approve, applaud, or admire him; it was not that they might load him with honours or gifts; it was not that they might call him a sensible guide, a wise teacher; far less, a man of the world, a man of large experience of human nature, and of ready sympathy with human failings: it was, that he *might gain* them, gain them for Christ, gain them from hardness to faith and from the power of Satan for God: it was that he *might by all means save some*, rescue them from darkness and sin, and secure the safety of their souls in the day of the Lord. It was for this that he went for those seven days to the Temple, with the four men whose

vow he thought needless: for this, that he reminded the Jewish mob of his Judaism, pleaded his Roman citizenship to the Roman, and divided the Sanhedrin by calling himself a Pharisee. My friends, the question of motives is always a trying one: we cannot settle it for others, we cannot always settle it for ourselves: so many things enter into the composition of our best motives; so hard is it to shut out self even from our religion; so fertile are we in excuses for following inclination, and then clothing inclination in the garb of duty! Nevertheless by motives will be decided the last great judgment, and God even now leaves us not without some plain insight into them. Christian prudence, like Christian zeal, must be tried by its motive: if we would be (in any right sense) *all things to all men*, we must see that the object is, not to serve ourselves, but to gain them. *If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?*

3. And therefore, in the third place, let us say that there can be no such thing as a Christian prudence, where there is not also (in its place) a Christian courage. Thus the two parts of the subject are brought together at its close:

St Paul's courage last time, St Paul's prudence now. The two things are not only capable of combination: they are necessarily combined. One man is all fire, all energy, all zeal: he cares not for the world, he will set all right, he will correct abuses, he will rebuke sin: he fears not: he is all courage. Well, wait a while: see how it goes on: see how it ends. *The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God:* a spirit like his scarcely reminds us of the lowly Saviour, scarcely breathes anything of the love of God. When the motive comes to be disclosed, perhaps there was more of nature than of grace in that vehemence: we know not what God may have thought of it, or how He will deal with it. Another was all for quietness: every line of distinction was to be erased, every sharp corner rounded off, every colour shaded into every other: sins were always excused, punishments (Divine or human) disliked and deprecated: there was no backbone in his religion: you knew not why anything at all was this rather than that: you began (as you listened) to doubt the clearest definitions of truth and error, of right and wrong. Prudence had here degenerated into timidity; and that charity which is based on truth, into a goodnature which

merely avoids and dreads trouble. My friends, St Paul's courage and St Paul's prudence were parts of one whole. Take either away, and the Christian fabric was shaken. *I am ready not to be bound only but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus:* and therefore it is that *I am made all things to all men,* even *that by all means* for His dear sake *I may* at last *save some.* The courage of the Gospel, and the prudence of the Gospel, are, alike and equally, ingredients of the *mind which was in Christ Jesus.* In Him, and in all who are like Him, courage is a courage of love, and prudence is a prudence of devotion.

4. Finally, there is a prudence wholly of good: a prudence, yes, a twofold prudence, to which no limits need be set, on which no conditions need to be imposed. A prudence lest we do harm to others, and a prudence lest we ourselves fall unawares into sin.

(1) How many, calling themselves Christians, are careless lest they offend Christ's little ones! careless how much they *give occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully;* how much they cause the Gospel which they profess, to be calumniated or blasphemed! They take no pains to *provide things honest in the sight of all*

men. They go to the very edge of the precipice of evil, and think it enough if they just fall not over it. Meanwhile others are scandalized by their temerity, or encouraged by it and emboldened to do evil. This is for lack of a Christian prudence; for lack of that grace of which St Paul wrote, *If meat* or drink, if my doing or my forbearing to do, *make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat while the world standeth,* I will take no freedom, I will allow myself in no indulgence however innocent, however wholesome, *lest I make my brother to offend.*

(2) And as with regard to others, so also for ourselves, there is a prudence wholly of good: a prudence in regard to spiritual evils: a prudence which foresees, which avoids, which guards against, known and experienced temptations; temptations which will assail, because they have assailed; and which, even because they have prevailed against us, can be ascertained in the future, anticipated, and provided for. Here indeed courage and prudence coalesce and are at one. Here bravery is fear, and the timid man conquers. Here the chief enemy is self, and therefore he who *rules his own spirit* hath already *taken the city. It is written, Thou*

shalt not tempt the Lord thy God; and he tempts God who runs a risk needlessly. There is a foolhardiness which is the worst cowardice: to flee from evil is the first point of courage. The intemperate man ought to tremble at wine; the licentious man ought to close the very eye which is the inlet of evil. He is a fool who knows not his own weakness; and he is presumptuous who goes *with ten thousand* against *twenty.* God give us all this prudence! for with it He gives courage, with it strength, and with it victory.

LECTURE XII.

THE SECRET LIFE.

ACTS XXIII. 11.

And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

How refreshing, after a day of cloud and storm, to see a sunset of perfect calm; to have one hour at evening beautifully tranquil, the warring elements pacified, the air still and fragrant, the sky itself, as it were, swept and garnished in token of a peaceful night and a glorious dawn! How refreshing (to change the figure from the aspect of nature to the experience of human life) after a long day spent in the strife of tongues, whether amidst the

rivalries of common business, or the ceaseless contradictions and wranglings of a court of justice, to return at its close to the well-loved home, where the sweet or playful greeting of a long-tried affection in one moment smoothes the knit brow and relaxes the painful tension of the overwrought brain!

Such is the contrast between the day and the night here presented to us. The day has been one of anxious exertion. The morning saw St Paul standing before the council, defending himself under a false accusation before a prejudiced and bloodthirsty tribunal. There had been more than the common painfulness of such a position. The judge had ordered the prisoner, at his first words, to be smitten on the mouth. And the suddenness of the assault had drawn from the injured man a retort which on reflection he regretted. We all know how bitter, to a conscientious man, is the remembrance of such a deviation, momentary though it was and speedily atoned for, from his entire Christian consistency. The only real pain is that which we inflict upon ourselves: where there is no self-reproach, all else is tolerable. As the day went on, a fierce and angry storm had raged in the Sanhedrin:

it was not till there was danger of his being actually *pulled in pieces* by the contending factions, that St Paul was rescued from the council-room and brought back to his prison within the fortress.

Such had the day been: a day of exertion, a day of discomfort, a day of danger, *of rebuke and blasphemy.* And the prospect was as gloomy as the present. A long imprisonment, a tedious separation from Christian friends, and a vexatious interruption of Christian duties; more than probably, a confessor's sufferings and a martyr's end; these were *the things before,* as the other were *the things behind.*

Now it is in the night between two such days that the words of the text come in. The chief captain has *commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force, and bring him into the castle. And the night following* this scene of commotion and violence, *the Lord* Jesus Christ Himself *stood by him,* or *presented Himself to him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.* What a contrast to the rough voices which have lately raged around him! To be spoken kindly to, to be thought worthy of

any consideration or any regard; much more, to hear a word of encouragement, to be told to take comfort, to *be of good cheer;* even this would have been something: when a man has been long treated with contempt and insult, it has been known to bring the tears to his eyes to be but saluted in the street by a passing stranger: how much more, to be visited in the prison by Christ Himself, to hear His voice speaking to him; the same voice which called once to him from heaven to convert and to commission; the same voice which he had heard once again when he was *praying in the temple, sending him far hence unto the Gentiles;* the same voice which in the distant Corinth had commanded him to *speak and not hold his peace,* because Christ *was with him, and had much people in that city;* the same voice which had once answered his prayer for relief from suffering, with the *far better* assurance that his Saviour's *grace* should be *made perfect in* his *weakness;* to hear that voice calling him now by his name, and bidding him to take courage, what must this have been to him! how must it have wiped from his mind every trace of irritation and of weariness! how must it have rekindled his hope and reani-

mated his courage! how must it have brought to his remembrance the words, uttered in distress and suffering, of his Master Himself, *And shall leave me alone...and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me!*

To be visited by Christ, and to hear the voice of Christ, this was enough: but what words were those! *Thou hast testified of me at Jerusalem.* The original is stronger still, expressive of a bold, a public, and a persistent testimony. So then his Master had accounted him faithful. His Master had heard all that passed; heard and approved. That for which other men wait, and wait still, and die without receiving, a verdict of Divine acquittal, St Paul has now, has from the lips of his Judge: Christ counts him faithful, Christ approves his work, Christ accepts his testimony. O recompense ample and glorious for any toil, for any suffering! Christ says He accepts: *who is he that condemneth?*

But more yet than this. *As thou hast testified of me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.* It is on record, in his own Epistles, how much St Paul had longed to visit Rome; with how warm an affection he already regarded that congregation which was gathered

in the metropolis of the Empire and of the world. Now his Master tells him that he shall go there: not perhaps as he had intended; not in the exercise of his own free will, planning for himself and executing for himself the enterprises of the Apostolic calling: but he shall go there: he shall minister to that congregation: yea, in the camp of the Roman soldiers, and in the palace of the Roman Emperor, his voice shall be heard, his testimony shall be borne, and Christ shall be *magnified in his body, whether by life or by death.*

To us, who know not the motive and feel not the impulse of a burning Christian zeal, the promise may seem to speak rather fear than hope: it opened before a weary man the prospect of labour, before a suffering man the prospect of suffering: it said, *Think not that the battle is ended; think not that rest is earned; dream not of a brief inactivity, and then a happy entrance into an eternal home. Far other is thy portion. Thou hast laboured, and thou shalt labour: thou hast journeyed, and thou shalt journey: thou hast struggled, and wrestled, and suffered, and not fainted; and for my name's sake thou shalt do even thus again.* We must call in St Paul himself to be his own

interpreter, and hear him say, *I am in a strait betwixt two; having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you: and having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all, for your furtherance and joy of faith:* I know it, and I am willing.

We have been called on late occasions to dwell upon various features of St Paul's regenerated character. His devotion, his wisdom, his courage, his tenderness, his endurance, his prudence; many opposite and at first sight contradictory qualities, which yet enter, every one of them, into the composition of that mind which is really according to Christ Jesus; have been presented to us by turns, as we have studied the pages of this Book of Holy Scripture. And St Paul himself seems to recognize as a profitable occupation the study of his Christian example. *Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ. They glorified God in me.* The only fear is, lest we should ever forget Christ in His servant; lest, in our admiration of the man, we should lose sight for one moment of the grace which wrought in him; that Divine influence and inworking of which he spoke himself, when he disclaimed all personal merit

and all separate strength, and said, *I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.* We must take care to *glorify God in him.*

And therefore I am glad that this evening's subject, following so naturally from that of last Sunday, takes us into a higher region than that of any human character; traces the river to its first spring, and shows it to us, not in its derived and too often turbid windings, but in its original sparkling freshness as it *proceeds out of the* very *throne of God and of the Lamb.* We see tonight, as we do in every page of his writings, what made St Paul that which he was. The history and the Epistles in this as in every point harmonize and are at one. The Epistles give us his inner mind: the history gives us his mind in action; shows how that principle which is necessarily a secret with the man himself, comes out and works in the life that is seen. Here and there—the text is such an instance—something occurs even in the narrative, to give a momentary glimpse into that inmost being, with which *the stranger doth not intermeddle.*

It is easy to direct the attention, and even to attract a large tribute of admiration, to

St Paul's wonderful gifts; his extraordinary self-devotion, his profound humility, his great patience, his dauntless heroism. But the moment we pass within, and seek to apprehend the moving spring of all this, to understand what his secret soul was busied in and possessed with and supported by, then we feel ourselves powerless; we are *speaking mysteries*, not to others only, but to ourselves. We are out of our depth: we are using words, not so much to express, but rather to veil and to perplex. I would that it might be otherwise this evening with some who hear! For indeed the effort must be made, if we would not disparage instead of glorifying God in him.

Let us at least then dare to say this—and his own words best say it—that to St Paul *to live was Christ.* There was not an act, and there was not a word; not a feeling, and not an effort; into which Christ did not enter. In saying this, we say all. And you cannot open any one chapter of any one of St Paul's Epistles, without seeing that this at least is true.

St Paul trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of his sins. *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. For this cause I obtained mercy, that in*

me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering.

St Paul trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for continued acceptance. *It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*

St Paul trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for the daily supply of grace. *He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee. I will glory therefore in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

St Paul trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for guidance. *God Himself and our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ direct our way unto you.*

St Paul trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for comfort. *As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.*

St Paul looked to the Lord Jesus Christ for the relief of trial. *For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.*

St Paul looked to the Lord Jesus Christ for approval. *If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.*

St Paul looked to the Lord Jesus Christ for success in work. *I thank Christ Jesus our*

Lord, who hath enabled me, putting me into the ministry.

Christ was his subject. *We preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord. Whom we preach.*

Christ was his Master. *I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.*

Christ was his boast. *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Christ was his hope. *Which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. The Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope.*

Christ was his life. *Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*

Christ was the one object of his expectation and of his aspiration, in reference to the state beyond death. *I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ. And so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

Christ was his present Friend and Comforter, in the emergencies of the life that now is. You have heard it in the text of this evening.

Let me earnestly add, even before I pass on, that St Paul never so spoke of Christ as to leave out of sight the blessed revelation of the Father, or the comforting and inspiring agency

of the Holy Ghost. To him *God was in Christ. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.* And to him the Holy Spirit was the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. He never forgot, as some Christians have done, the Unity of the Godhead. Christ was *God with us:* and the Holy Spirit was to him *Christ in us.*

But I would ask with all seriousness, Is not this our radical defect, as professed Christians, that Christ is nothing to us? When we have said that His death atoned for our sins, is anything left? Are we not, at the best, what good men were under the Old Dispensation? What know we of Christ as the Lord our Righteousness, as the Lord our Strength, as the Lord our Master, our Friend, and our Hope?

And if not, why not?

1. There is sometimes, in these latter days, a great ignorance of sin. That deep sense of personal guilt, which breathes so impressively in the Psalms of David; that consciousness of the present weight of sin as of *a sore burden too heavy for us to bear;* that fearful apprehension of a soul cut off from God, by reason of its defilement with that which God abhors; this is an experience rare amongst us: the words remain—a man can scarcely worship

without using them—but the thing is lost: *When I consider, I am afraid of Him,* is a combination of ideas, scarcely of this century. We have agreed together not to be afraid of God: we have softened down the revelation of justice and judgment, till now it speaks but the refined language of a luxurious age, and ceases altogether to awaken in us any feeling corresponding to that which St Paul designates as *the terror of the Lord.* We scarcely see now why we want a Saviour: surely the mercy of God, interpreted by man's shrinking from punishment, will do as well as the more assured hope of a pardon purchased for us through suffering? God grant us grace so to learn betimes the lesson of our sin, that we may not have to awaken to it for the first time, when it flashes upon us in the light of eternity, or in the vision of the *great white throne!*

2. Again, the even tenor of a calm uneventful life is against our appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ in some of His chief and most attractive offices. One day is so like another, and each day is so tranquil and so unsuggestive of danger, that we are never stirred to the depth: a surface life is all our life: the profound Ocean within lies all asleep, and

scarcely a wave breaks upon the shore of our monotonous and untroubled being. Such a state is unfavourable to religion; most unfavourable to a strong and vigorous hold upon the revelation of Christ. If trouble came, if distress, if pestilence, if famine, if war; if the windows of heaven were opened, and God's *four sore judgments* broke suddenly upon a forgetful earth; then we should see what Christ means: then the idea of a living Saviour, controlling the winds and waves, guiding the thunderbolt of judgment, and setting in the cloud (the while) the rainbow of mercy; a Saviour present with His people, and soon to come again to victory and to judgment; would become once more a reality and a hope: men would read St Paul's Epistles with a quickened sympathy, and his history with a sense of its reality and of its strength. *When Thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.*

And must we wait for these things? Must we resign ourselves to this spiritual torpor, and say that only the hand of judgment can break it? God forbid! *If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.* We must strive, God helping us, to stir the stagnant pool of a com-

monplace life by turning into it the stream of that *river which*, always and in all times, *makes glad the city of God.* In other words, we must strive, and we must watch, and we must pray, that we ourselves may so enter into the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ in all His manifold offices of grace and love, that we may neither need the stroke of judgment, nor yet be dizzied by it if it comes. Begin this night to call upon Jesus Christ as that which St Paul found Him. Begin to *live the life that you now live in the flesh, by faith in that Son of God* who transformed and glorified his. If you do not all at once consciously find Him; if you have often to gaze upon Him in the darkness, and to pray to Him through the cloud; still persevere: struggle on: rest not till your life is a Christian life, as much in its secret as in its outward workings! Determine, God helping you, to rely upon Christ, even if you cannot yet see Him. Believe in His Atonement, in His Intercession, in His Advent; believe, above all, in His life. Be sure that He is there; there, in the place whither your prayer goes; there, where God is: there, in all the truth of His manhood; there, in all the power of His Godhead! Pray towards Him: pray on

the strength of Him: pray through Him: and ask Him, of His infinite mercy, not to leave you for long without a token, without an evidence, of His being!

3. And then let your life, like St Paul's life, be His witness. *As thou hast borne witness of me at Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.* Yes, that is the third thing—the only other which I will mention—interfering now, as indeed in all times, with the distinctively Christian faith. It is the looseness of our Christian walk. We do not feel more, because we do not practise more; because we do not carry our warfare into all its parts; because we do not seriously set ourselves to be holy as Christ is holy. Brief and perfunctory is our daily worship; hasty and superficial our evening self-examination; slight the hold of our religion upon our life; ready the excuse, ready and plausible, for keeping just this, and just that, out of the reach of conscience, out of the sight of God. And then the sowing has its reaping: the faith which is thus trifled with becomes a mere opinion; the principle which would not practise becomes a dead letter; and the Saviour whom we have often *prayed to depart* withdraws Himself, reluctant-

ly but irrevocably, *out of our coasts.* Change that prayer, beloved brethren, this night; from a prayer to depart, into a wrestling with Him to stay! Witness for Him at Jerusalem, and He will make you His witness also at Rome. Let your daily life be lived as in His presence; as reminding others of Him; as confessing Him and witnessing to Him in the life that now is: and He will make that witness evermore brighter, stronger, and more consistent, till faith is swallowed up in sight, and hope lost in fruition.

To those who have long waited for Christ, and walked with Christ, and witnessed for Christ, the text itself has at length a true, if not a literal fulfilment. When they want Christ, they shall have Him. *The night following the Lord stood by him.* Yes, *the night following:* not in the glare of day, not *in the chief place of concourse,* but in the stillness of night and in the solitude of the chamber, Christ visits them that are His, and adapts His consolations to their individual case and need. Trouble may be upon them; care, want, bereavement: harder still to bear, ingratitude, undutifulness: unnatural neglect and coldness: it may be, suffering for His sake, because they would not

follow a multitude to do evil, because they would reprove sin and strive after holiness: even then, even there, shall Christ come, and with His own calm voice, bringing its witness with it, bid them to be of good cheer, and assure them of His abiding presence. *This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord:* no vain vision, no fallacious fancy, picturing Angel forms and counterfeiting Angel voices to the mere novice (if even a novice) in the life of God; but a presence felt within, and a consolation ministered personally in the sober promised influence of the Divine Spirit.

Seek, my friends, that presence: cherish that influence: and life itself will take a new colour from the hopes and joys beyond.

LECTURE XIII.

THE GOOD CONFESSION.

ACTS XXIV. 14, 15.

But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets:
And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

How striking, and yet how simple, are the contrasts of Scripture! the cases in which (as must often happen in real life, and therefore also in true history) two persons appear together on the stage, exhibiting, in speech or action, a totally opposite principle, spirit, and character!

The chapter before us opens with such a contrast.

We left St Paul in custody at Cæsarea. After that hurried night-journey, under a strong military escort, of which we glanced at the details on a former occasion, he had been presented before the governor Felix with the letter describing his case, and then remanded for a fuller hearing when his accusers should also come.

His enemies at Jerusalem lost no time in following him. Within five days the high priest Ananias, accompanied by a deputation from the Sanhedrin, and by one of those professional advocates who practised in the provincial courts of Rome, arrived in Cæsarea to lay their information against Paul before the tribunal of Felix. It is almost startling to read the language of adulation in which the orator Tertullus addresses the presiding magistrate. Felix was a man conspicuous even among Roman governors for violence, rapacity and licentiousness. He was of low birth, raised from a servile position; and the historian Tacitus says of him that *in the practice of all manner of cruelty and lust he wielded the powers of a king with the temper of a slave.* With a cer-

tain degree of vigour in the suppression of tumults and robberies, he combined a meanness of personal revenge which led him to procure the murder of a high priest by paid assassins in the very sanctuary of the Temple. His wife Drusilla he had enticed away from a lawful husband by the aid (it is said) of a magician. When at last he quitted the province, he was followed to Rome by the accusations of his subjects, and was indebted for his escape from justice to the personal interest of his brother, a freedman and favourite, with the Emperor Nero.

This was the man whom the orator Tertullus, overacting his part, represented, in his opening address, as a model of beneficence and clemency. How different in all times the flattery of the worldly from the courtesy of the Christian!

The charge brought against the prisoner seems to have included three particulars.

(1) He was guilty of sedition; and so of disloyalty to the Roman government. (2) He was guilty of heresy; the *ringleader of a sect;* and so a renegade from Judaism. (3) He was guilty of profaning the temple; and thus of affronting a worship which

was under the patronage and protection of Rome.

The charges were the old ones: familiar to us already in the case of Stephen, and in the history of One greater and holier still.

The time came for the Apostle's defence. And this was the substance of it, as preserved for us in the record of his friend and companion St Luke.

He begins by selecting the one only ground on which he could count himself fortunate in being tried before Felix. He could depend at least upon his acquaintance with the rites and customs of Judaism. *Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I cheerfully answer for myself; because thou canst understand*—thou art able to exercise a full and certain knowledge of this fact—*that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship at Jerusalem.* Felix knew the day of that feast of Pentecost for which St Paul had gone up to Jerusalem. He knew that it was but twelve days since. Twelve days: it was a short time to account for. A short time for the commission of this triple crime; sedition, heresy, and sacrilege. Twelve days: and already five of them in prison! How had the other seven been spent?

And neither in the temple did they find me disputing with any man, or making an insurrection of a multitude, either in the synagogues or through the city; nor can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call a sect—in accordance with that doctrine and that system to which Tertullus in his accusation has given the contemptuous title of *the sect of the Nazarenes—so serve I the God of my fathers.* Not a new God: not, as they would represent it, some novel Deity, unknown to my nation, and imported from the regions of imagination and invention: no; *the God of my fathers;* the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob; the God of prophets and kings and righteous men along the whole line of Israel and of David. *So worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things that are written throughout the law and by the prophets; having a hope toward God, which these men also themselves accept, that there is about to be a resurrection both of just and unjust.*

A *hope,* St Paul calls it: what do we?

But let us take the passage as a whole.

1. And first, a single word upon the manner of his address. He stands before a wicked ruler;

a profligate man in private, and a tyrant in public life. Yet he pays to him the respect due to his office. It is the same man who wrote lately from Corinth to the Roman Christians, *Render therefore to all their dues; fear, to whom fear; honour, to whom honour.* There is all the difference in the world between servility and courtesy; between the flattery of Tertullus, and the manly respectfulness of St Paul. Insolence to rulers, however irreligious or however immoral, is no part of the religion of Christ. *Render unto Cæsar,* our Lord said Himself, *the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's.*

2. The reverence of his answer strikes us: so does also its cheerfulness. *I answer cheerfully for myself.* He was here in prison; tossed from one judgment-seat to another; surrounded by violent opponents, hated, maligned, and plotted against. The issue of the trial was doubtful: this only he knew from the revelation of the Lord Himself, that he had a testimony to bear to Him at Rome. The present was dark, the future was ambiguous: and yet he answers for himself cheerfully. Is it a needless or an exceptional lesson which I draw from these words? the

lesson of a Christian cheerfulness? If we are in Christ's hands; if we are on Christ's side in the great conflict; if we have *committed the keeping of our souls to Him;* if we in any sense *know in whom we have believed;* what circumstance, what danger, what accusation, what anxiety, is enough to justify despondency? Pain of mind or body, want, weakness, anguish, impending death; all shall be well: for *I am Christ's, and Christ is God's.* Leave despondency to the unbelieving: yet leave not even him in it! Tell him of One who died and who lives; of One who is nearer than the nearest friend, and merciful as He is true; and bid him also cast away his burden at the foot of the cross, and rise at Christ's bidding to joy and newness of life!

3. When we turn from the manner to the matter of the defence, we find two of the three charges calmly and earnestly repelled. The charge of sedition, and the charge of sacrilege, are refuted by an appeal to fact. None can dare to say of him, that his time, his brief time, in Jerusalem had been spent in creating insurrection, or even in holding disputation. *They neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people:*

neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. His supposed desecration of the Temple was not only untrue; it was the very opposite of truth. For a very different purpose had he frequented its courts; to show (in its proper place) his respect for the Law, and his sense, if not now of its necessity, yet at least of its innocence for Israel.

4. But there is just one of the three charges which he rather qualifies than repels. The accusers had called him a sectarian: *a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.* And *this,* he says, *I confess to thee, that after the way,* the system or rule of life, *which they call a sect;* the word is the same (in the original language) in the accusation and in the defence; *after the way which they call a sect,* a new party and a new schism in the original Church of Israel, *so worship I.* The thing is true. If it be a schismatical thing to be a Christian, if it be heresy to believe the Gospel, I am guilty of it. *According to* the doctrine and the practice of *the way*—that *way* of which we have read so often as an expression for the Gospel system —*so worship I.* I avow and I glory in it.

Are we, my friends, equally clear and equally plainspoken in the matter of our worship? Do

we all know *after what way* we serve God; by whose rule we shape our prayers and fashion our life? Of course we all answer, By the rule of Christ. But then we must enquire further, Is there anything distinctive in our religion? anything which shows and proves that it is Christ's religion, rather than the religion of Moses, or of nature? You all see that I am struck by this consideration: that St Paul worshipped God according to a particular system; not vaguely as the Creator and Preserver, not merely as the Lawgiver and the Judge, but definitely and precisely as revealed in Christ. St Paul had thought it necessary to come out from the prevalent worship of his time, though that worship was founded on a revelation from God, in order that he might worship according to that way which his countrymen as a body called and persecuted as a heresy. What is there, I seriously and earnestly enquire of you, to mark our confessions, our prayers, our praises, our thanksgivings, as offered *according to the way*, which is, the way of Christ? Does our Lord Jesus Christ really enter into all? Do we think of Him, do we trust in Him, do we enter through Him, on the ground of His sacrifice and of His

intercession, whensoever, in public or in private, we endeavour to approach God? And O, let me add, Is there anything in our manner of life, in our habits of speech and action, which recognizes and which can remind men of our faith in *the way*, the way of Christ?

5. St Paul repudiates the charge of sedition and the charge of profanation: he in part confesses the crime of heresy. If it be heresy to be a Christian, he is a heretic. But observe how he claims for himself, all the time, the position of the truly orthodox: how he asserts that his enemies, and not he, are the real dissenters from Israel's faith and from Israel's hope: the God whom he worships is *the God of his fathers*, and his grasp of the Law and the Prophets is as tenacious as it was ever. He *believes all things written* in the Old Testament Scriptures, and it is just because he does so that he is a Christian. *If they* really *believed Moses, they* also (like him) *would have believed Christ.*

The true revelation of God, my brethren, is never at variance with itself. Everything which God has ever spoken, is true still, and will be true for ever. His voice in nature, His voice in reason, His voice in conscience; His

voice to the Patriarchs, His voice in the Law, His voice in the Prophets, His voice in the Gospel; are all, in reality, consistent and harmonious. Each one of these adds something, completes something, fulfils something, in the one before it; but it destroys and it contradicts nothing. The education of the world, like the education of the man, is indeed progressive: some things are taught in type and shadow then, in plainness and in substance now: some things are given as commands at one time, as principles and reasons later: some things are kept back from one age, because it could not bear, because it is unprepared for them, and communicated to an age that follows: nay, our Lord Himself tells us, that some things in the Mosaic Dispensation were allowed, *for the hardness of men's hearts*, which neither were so *from the beginning*, nor are left so in the *dispensation of the fulness of times*. Is not this just the system of a wise parent, adapting his disclosures of knowledge, and even (in some respects) his requirements of duty, to the age in years, and to the moral stature, of the son whose eventual perfection is his object? Yet, none the less for these qualifications, the God of the Christian Apostle was the God of the

Israelite fathers: and *all things written in the Law and the Prophets*, when the interpreting light of a more perfect day is thrown back upon them from the Gospel, are believed still in the Church of Christ, forming at once the basis and the complement of the faith delivered in Christianity to the saints. He who affects, unlike St Paul, to despise the Old Testament Scriptures, proves himself by that contempt to be not a full-grown man but a very babe in Christ. *Let him become a fool, that he may be wise.*

6. We have reached now that latest portion of the text, in which St Paul claims for Israel under the Law a glimmering at least of that *hope*, for which, as a Christian and an Apostle, he was himself *bound with his chain. I have hope*, he says, *toward God*, a hope *which these men*, my accusers, *themselves also accept, that there shall be* hereafter *a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.*

It was Christ, he says in one of his Epistles, who *brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel.* And any one who seeks his proofs of immortality in the Pentateuch, or even in the Prophets, is going back from the surer to the more doubtful, from the plainer to the

more ambiguous. Yet St Paul says that for those who lived before Christ there was such a hope; the hope of an immortal existence, basing itself upon the specific words or upon the general sense of Scripture. Because the Pharisees held the doctrine of the existence of spirit, and of the general Resurrection, he condescends to say himself, as he stands before the council, *Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee.* And One greater than St Paul answered the infidel Sadducee, upon this very tenet, out of the pages of the Old Testament; saying, *Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob: for He is not a God of the dead, but of the living:* and that is not the life of man, which is the life but of one half of man: a disembodied soul wants an essential part of the integrity of man's life: if a man is to live for ever, he must live as the whole of a man: there must be a resurrection of the body, as well as an immortality of the soul.

It suited the occasion and the purpose of this heroic defence, to trace the hope of the Resurrection to a Dispensation earlier than the Christian. And we too must accept the decla-

ration, and give thanks for it, that even the Old Testament is not silent as to this great *refreshing* and *restitution of all things*. We can read still in those sacred pages the burst of human trust and of Divine Inspiration with which prophets and righteous men asserted their personal expectation along with the predicted glory of Him that should come. Though not for himself alone, nor for himself most literally, yet surely for himself also, David (to take one familiar instance) says in the 16th Psalm, *My flesh also shall rest in hope; for Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell...In Thy presence is fulness of joy, and at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.* And Isaiah, in words to which one interpretation only can be given, *Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise: Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.*

7. But it is still more important for us to observe the terms in which the Resurrection is here spoken of, and to ask how far we ourselves can enter into them.

It might have been a natural, though a false, view of the Resurrection, to confine it to the revival of the Christian. *The resurrection*

of the just is an expression used by our Lord, and to that extent at least His disciples would readily have accepted it. *Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.* But He stopped not there, nor can His Church stop there, in the enunciation of this stupendous mystery. *The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice*—the voice of the Son of Man—*and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. I saw the dead,* says the Apostle who recorded that saying of his Master, *I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God...And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.* There is a resurrection of the unjust, as well as a resurrection of the just. The prospect before none of us is annihilation. Gladly would the sinner exchange that neutral, negative, insensate doom, for *the worm* that *dieth not, and the fire* that *is not quenched.* But not such is the alternative before us. An immortality of blessedness or of misery is the prospect of that world into which *sin* once *entered, and death by sin.*

The words themselves are alarming: who shall paint the thing signified?

And yet St Paul calls it a hope. I *have hope toward God,* &c. My friends, the Resurrection must be either the hope, or the fear, of each one of us. And which? which of the two? a hope, or a fear? for you? for me?

We are in danger of having all Christian doctrine washed out and washed away. The expectation of the Resurrection is no longer (practically) the expectation of Christians. They look rather for a reunion with departed friends in a state almost independent of Gospel faith and Gospel holiness. They have begun to dream of a change begun and ended in death, such as shall transform the earthly into the heavenly, the sensual and the devilish into the spiritual and the Godlike. We want bringing back to the primitive touchstone: Art thou just, or art thou unjust? Such, for thee, will be the Resurrection. Art thou now *washed and justified and sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God?* Then shalt thou be at the right hand in the great gathering. Then shall the King say to thee, *Come, thou blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for thee from the foundation*

of the world. Then shalt thou be *numbered among the children of God, and* thy *lot* shall be *among the saints.* Then is the Resurrection to thee a hope, not a fear: a bright and blessed reversal of all earth's sorrows, not a bewilderment and a condemnation and a torture for ever.

But art thou still living in sin? Is the world still thy god? Art thou athirst for its pleasures, its riches, its honours? Is the flesh still thy master? Does it rule thee with a rod of iron, bidding thee take thy fill of sense, bidding thee sin, and sin on, and sin on, though thou die for it? Is thine eye set upon things below, counting nothing so bright or so desirable as the smile of man that shall die, the applause of the son of man that shall soon be as the dust from which he was taken? Then hast thou altogether forfeited the Christian hope, and must take in its stead the world's terror. For thee the Resurrection must be an expectation, but it cannot be a hope; a horrible dread, not a soothing comfort.

God grant us that *mind which was in Christ Jesus; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross!* Then shall all sorrow, all pain, all loneliness, all distress, be as nothing; and the future, the long, the eternal future, be

all in all! Then shall we be able to say, *Come loss, come sorrow, come bereavement, come solitude; only be mine the hope of the faithful, mine at last the resurrection of the just!*

LECTURE XIV.

CONSCIENCE.

ACTS XXIV. 16.

And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.

EVERY word is weighty. *Conscience—a conscience void of offence—offence toward God, and toward men—I exercise myself, herein, to have it so*—these are the elements of our grave subject. We must first separate, and then combine them.

1. The keynote of the whole sentence is that word conscience. What is conscience?

It has been sometimes defined as *a moral memory*. But it is more. Conscience has to

do not with the past only, though with it chiefly. In that sense poets and moralists have dwelt finely and sternly upon its operations. *This is twice living, to enjoy life past;* to be able to reflect upon the days that are gone, with satisfaction and with self-approval. On the other hand, *The first and foremost punishment of sinners is to have sinned: fortune may adorn a crime with her gifts, as if protecting and vindicating it; but it goes not unpunished, since the scourge of the crime is in the crime itself.* In such applications, conscience is a moral memory.

But it is more. Conscience, the word I mean, denotes a *fellow-knowledge;* a knowledge shared with another, and yet that other oneself. St Paul says, in one of his Epistles, *I know nothing by myself:* it is properly *with myself:* I have no fellow-knowledge with myself of anything to be ashamed of. That fellow-knowledge is conscience. Conscience is a man's privity to his own conduct, in thought and word and deed. Out of this all its workings and all its effects spring. *I know with myself.* I am so made that I cannot help this fellow-knowledge. I must, perforce, take cognizance of my own actions, and sit in judg-

ment upon my own secret thoughts. This is conscience.

The word conscience occurs more than thirty times in the New Testament, and of these more than twenty are in St Paul's unquestioned writings.

(1) It is to the conscience of man that he says he addresses his Gospel. *By manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.* Let each man's fellow-knowledge, each man's privity to himself, feel, as he listens to my Gospel, that it is a word of truth and soberness; a word worthy of God, and a word wholesome for man. *We are made manifest unto God, and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.*

(2) To his own conscience he appeals for testimony. *I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness,* bearing witness with me, *in the Holy Ghost.* His own fellow-knowledge, his own introspection, his privity to himself, assures him of sincerity, of perfect truthfulness, in that which he is about to utter.

(3) He speaks more than once of a good conscience. *I have lived,* he says of himself before the council, *in all good conscience before*

God until this day. He bids his friend to *hold faith and a good conscience;* and adds that some, having parted with the latter, have made shipwreck also upon the other. The deacon must be one who in like manner, *holds the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.* The fellow-knowledge, the self-privity, must be good, must be pure—clean and not defiled—if a man would keep a firm hold even upon sound doctrine.

(4) In other places he speaks of a weak conscience; of one whose self-judgment is timid and overscrupulous, unenlightened as to the extent of his Christian freedom, but who yet, while it is so, must respect and follow it, at the risk of losing altogether the guidance of the one inward light of man.

(5) On the other hand, St Paul tells of an evil or bad conscience; of a self-knowledge which is a knowledge of evil, testifying to the inmost being of sins done and sins unrepented of, creating a discord within, and raising an impassable barrier between man and God.

(6) And so, step by step, we reach that which St Paul describes, in his Epistle to Titus, as a defiled conscience; a self-knowledge which is privy not only to particular acts of transgression, but to a thorough choice and love of

evil. *Unto the pure all things are pure; but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.*

(7) From these there is but a step, if one, to the state described as characteristic of some in the latter times, who *have their conscience seared with a hot iron;* actually branded and cauterized with an obdurate and an indelible mark and stain of evil. *Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.* From that last and most fearful condition may God in His infinite mercy save all who hear me!

2. Now the conscience which St Paul here describes himself as striving after, is one *void of offence.* The exact word is *unstumbling, not striking against stumbling stones.* It is formed from that verb which we find in the 91st Psalm (as quoted in our Lord's Temptation): *In their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone.* St Paul desires to have a conscience, or self-privity, free from such impact; free from col-

lision with stones or rocks impeding its course. The figure is most expressive. He does not speak here of preserving his life from stumbling, but his conscience: not therefore of the act or the word or the idea of evil, but rather of the effect of such things upon his self-cognizance, upon his inward view and review, upon his feeling and his consciousness as he looks within. He is determined, God helping him by the grace of His Holy Spirit, that his introspection, his perpetual judgment upon himself, shall not find itself impeded and embarrassed in its course by stones and stumbling-blocks of evil done and good left undone; shall not trip here over a hasty or uncharitable word, and there over a neglected duty, and there over an injured soul, and there over a corrupt or polluting imagination: its course shall be clear as it judges: the straight and smooth and unstained surface of the life and soul shall present nothing for the self-cognizance to dash against as an upbraiding, accusing, or condemning object. This is the figure. The conscience, not the life only, must be kept void of offence. He would be able to say, *I know nothing by (against) myself.*

3. And he adds that there are two chief

departments of this unstumbling conscience; corresponding to the two great divisions of human duty. *A conscience void of offence, toward God, and toward man.* When the thought of God is presented, the self-judgment is not staggered: and when the thought of man is presented, still the self-cognizance, the inward privity, is not beset by monuments of reproach or evil.

We are speaking of great things here. Where is he amongst us who can bear the application of St Paul's test?

Some men are not afraid of the second table. Like the rich young ruler in the Gospel, they can stand up before Christ, and say, *All these commandments have I observed from my youth.* They have done no harm, they can say it sometimes on a deathbed, to any man: their conscience is clear. It is not a good sign, this confidence: dying Christians generally express themselves quite differently: they feel themselves sinners, and their hope is fixed on a Saviour of sinners. But at least when the attention of the inward judge is turned to the first table—to that law which bids man love the Lord his God with all his heart and mind and soul and strength—then surely the self-deceiver

will be unmasked to himself: the conscience is not void of offence: its course, as it bears the case, is not smooth but stumbling: God has not been loved with half the love bestowed upon self and upon the creature: and the verdict must be, *Yet lackest thou one thing;* and that *one thing lacking* was *the one thing needful!*

4. I hasten to St Paul's account of his own effort after the attainment of this clear, this unstumbling conscience. *Herein,* he says before Felix, his unscrupulous and immoral judge, *herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence.*

Herein. On the ground of this; of this expectation (of which we spoke last Sunday) of *a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.* St Paul's hope was not a lazy, listless waiting for a prize of which he was certain: that Resurrection which was the hope of Israel, which is the hope of the Church, stirred him to perpetual efforts, and reconciled him to a severe self-discipline. On the strength of this hope *I exercise myself;* or, more exactly, *I myself also,* I, who might be thought safe of it, I, who might be considered as placed by my call and my Apostleship above the risk of failing or falling short of glory, *I myself also exercise.*

The word is remarkable. It is the term applied to the training of an athlete. It expresses that long course of discipline by which alone a man could be prepared for a gymnastic feat. *Every man that striveth for the mastery,* every man who engages in an athletic contest, *is temperate,* exercises self-control and self-discipline, *in all things. I train myself to have a conscience void of offence.*

We are apt to think that, whatever other difficulties the Apostles had to contend with, they had none within. We know that they were exposed to perpetual privations, persecutions, and sufferings: but we take it for granted that their enemies were all outward, and that a constant and even rapturous devotion secured to them an entire immunity from what we feel to be the greatest difficulties and the worst dangers of a Christian life.

How strongly does St Paul combat this error! Hear him as he writes to the Corinthians, using the figure so familiar to his readers from the spectacle of their Isthmian games. *I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air: but I keep under my body*—the word is far stronger in the original—*I buffet my body*—I meet it day by day, as it were, in

pugilistic encounter—*and bring it into subjection (servitude); lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away.* Could any language express more forcibly the identity of his daily struggle with that of the commonest man? His nature was our nature; the cravings of his body as imperious, the rovings of his fancy as capricious, the desires of his mind as eager, as our own: some troubles he had, and some temptations, even greater and more obstinate than ours: and while he had daily to lead others to the battle, he was compelled to engage in it himself for life or death. It did not come naturally to him to have a conscience void of offence. He had to train himself for it, by daily buffetings of his own body, mortifications of his own inclination, and crucifixions of his own will. The hope of a glorious resurrection bore him up, and in Christ's strength he went forward *conquering and to conquer.*

The subject is its own application.

(1) *Ye see your calling, brethren.* The Christian life is not easy. St Paul found it a severe life. He had to train for it. He had to fight with his own body day by day. His enemy was (in one sense, though not in an-

other) flesh and blood. He knew what weariness was, what languor was, what an ailing body was, what a lonely saddened spirit was, what a *hardly bestead* and tempted heart was. We must be men, if we would be Christians. While we call in the arm of grace, we must also *lift up the hands which hang down, and* confirm *the feeble knees.* The Christian conflict is not a dream: it is a reality. Every one is against us, except One. The flesh is against us; making duty a daily difficulty, and nature itself a daily snare. The world is against us; our own little world—small and insignificant, but not weak for us—the world of our own acquaintance, our own household, our own nearest and most chosen friends. All, in their own way, are a snare to us; either making heaven less real, or the world more real, than it would be without them. But what then? Brave men are only roused by difficulties: if the Gospel demands courage, it is all the more a Gospel for men. Ours is no languid, dreamy, delicious religion; lying still now, and to rest for ever then! It is a religion of activity, of enterprise, of ambition; a religion which wears armour, and which wields weapons, and which points onwards to a crown. In the very same

degree it is a religion which takes men as they are, and which offers to make them what they ought to be. *I train myself,* St Paul says, for my high calling.

(2) Secondly, and most obviously, learn the place of conscience in the Christian scheme. It is not enough for a man to be what is commonly called a conscientious man. Cornelius was that, and more, before his conversion. St Paul was that, and more, before his conversion. Yet the one must send men to Joppa for one who should tell him words of salvation. And the other must see Jesus Christ Himself, showing him to his own heart as *the chief of sinners,* and then disclosing to him *a more excellent way.* But though obedience to conscience (apart from Christ) is not salvation, yet there is thus much of connection and continuity between a life before and a life after conversion, that it is still conscience which guides, only conscience itself has widened its field of vision and gained a new criterion of judgment. The revelation of Christ and the revelation of the Spirit make it a matter of conscience to trust in the One and to seek the other. When St Paul wrote, after his conversion, *And herein do I exercise myself, to*

have always a conscience void of offence; it meant something different from what he could have said equally before his conversion, *I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.* The latter was consistent with the persecution of the Church: the former had as its first principle affiance in Christ and devotion to His service. And yet, in the one as in the other, conscience was the guide; dark in the one state, light in the other. A man is not a conscientious man now, unless Christ, as well as God, *is in all his thoughts.*

(3) I speak to some this evening who have not yet sullied the transparency of conscience. They have in them, indeed, the taint of the original Adam: and they have acted that defilement (who has not?) in definite transgression. The youngest child here present has sinned: how much more we who are children no longer! Still there is a difference, and a marked difference, between the conscientious and the wicked; between those who regard duty, and those who heed not the voice and the light within them. How can I express, as St Paul here teaches us, the importance of attending to conscience? O, it is a sensitive and a delicate thing, this gift of human self-privity

and self-cognizance and self-judgment! In early days it speaks and is heard: a little disobedience, a little untruthfulness, a little selfishness and ill temper, will lie like a leaden weight upon the young conscience: it cannot rest without confession, it can scarcely forgive itself even when forgiven. Look on but a few years, and the child who trembled at an undutiful word, is a young man who can *make a mock at sin!* He has gone from step to step, first in the knowledge, then in the tolerance, at last in the touching and tasting and handling of evil: and now a sin which ought to lay him in the dust is done and remembered and jested at and revelled in: conscience has lost its edge: it *stumbles* not at the grossest form of evil. This instrument, this measure, this test, of right and wrong, may be spoilt, may be ruined, by careless and irreverent handling: and what is a man then? What is a ship without a rudder, or a mind without reason and without soul? I say then, to all here present who are either too young, or else too thoughtful, to have yet thrown away their compass, see that nothing tempt you to go against conscience! If a thing seems to you to be wrong, flee from it. If you have fallen into it unawares, confess, forsake, abjure

it. If something within says to you, *This is right,* let nothing induce you to swerve from it. *Keep innocency, and take heed unto the thing that is right: for this shall bring a man peace at the last.*

(4) Finally, it is too much to suppose that every member of the congregation can take to himself the last exhortation. A Christian minister cannot address himself only to the innocent. He has a Gospel for the sinful, or he would be a traitor to his Lord. *I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.* Let my latest thought this night be for those who may be amongst us with what the Scripture calls a bad conscience: men and women who may have within them tonight a restless spirit, an accusing voice, ringing in their inward ear a knell of reproach, and making their heart sink with what an Apostle has called *a certain fearful looking for of judgment.* Let me take from the Word of God last quoted an augury of hope for these! *Having our hearts,* it is written, *sprinkled from an evil conscience.* Do you feel that you have sinned? Has this last week witnessed your fall? Have you begun to say within yourself, *It is in vain?*

I resolve in vain, I struggle in vain, I pray in vain: let me alone: I must work out my destiny, and sink like lead in the mighty waters.? Yes, there are here, in this place tonight, immortal souls thus desponding: and probably the text of this Sermon, and much of its details, has rather daunted than elevated them: now therefore at its close I place those inspired, those inspiring words of the Apostle to the Hebrews, and say, Get *your hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience!* And do you say, Wherewith? I answer from the same Epistle, With *the blood of Jesus;* even that precious blood, which *cleanseth from all sin.* Yes, to this end Christ died, that He might *purge your conscience from dead works,* and so set you free *to serve the living God.* Put not from you that hope! There is no man who kneels before God as a sinner, self-accusing, self-condemning, self-despairing, who may not look upwards to the mercy-seat in heaven, and say, *For Thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive me* ALL *that is past!* It may be great sin, it may be foul sin, it may be presumptuous sin: *the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from* ALL *sin.* Get your heart sprinkled from an evil conscience by faith in the universal propitia-

tion. And then start afresh. Go forth from God's presence as a forgiven man, to live and to act upon that forgiveness. And if you fall again, come back again. Never will you cease to want that sprinkling—and never will the power of that sprinkling be worn out—until you are out of reach of temptation, out of reach of the world and of the flesh and of the devil for ever. This is not Antinomian doctrine: this is the doctrine in which resides the very hope of holiness, and its reality, and its humility, and its blessedness. Let no man say, *My conscience is defiled past redemption:* such language is treason against the Cross of Christ. Let no man say, *My conscience is seared past feeling:* if it were so, you would not know and you would not feel it. Still is the living *fountain open for sin and for uncleanness:* still may all who will, gather around that sacred spring, and buy there forgiveness and sanctification *without money and without price.*

LECTURE XV.

STIFLED CONVICTIONS.

ACTS XXIV. 25.

And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

IT is always interesting, as well as instructive, to see Christianity brought face to face with heathenism. More especially, to see a Christian prisoner brought to trial before a heathen judge; brought to trial for being a Christian; for having turned aside from Judaism into Christianity; from what the judge regards as a despicable superstition, into something yet more contemptible and degraded still. We can

see the smile of disdain with which the whole controversy is listened to. *When the accusers stood up,* says one of these judges, *they brought none accusation against him of such things as I supposed; but had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.* The great example itself was ever reenacted: the bewilderment of Pontius Pilate, who had to decide, at a moment's notice, that strangest and most momentous of all cases, when the Son of God Himself stood at the bar of a human judge, is seen over again in every one of these trials; the half misgiving that something deeper than his knowledge may be involved, struggling with the hardened and scoffing indifference which has learned to treat all religions as alike convenient and alike untrue.

Even thus was it here. Antonius Felix, once a slave, now a ruler; a profligate, an oppressor, and an assassin; is brought, for once in his life, face to face with the Gospel. We have heard the opening of the defence. St Paul, offering to the Roman magistrate no hollow compliments, yet paying the respect due to his office, has congratulated himself on standing before a judge who is no stranger to the cir-

cumstances to which he appeals in his defence. A nine years' acquaintance with the country will enable Felix to understand the bearing of points which might otherwise have seemed irrelevant. It is now only twelve days since he went up to Jerusalem; a short time—considering how a large part of it has been occupied, in a journey to Cæsarea as a prisoner—a short time for the commission of the triple crime with which he is charged; sedition, heresy, and sacrilege. His object in coming up to Jerusalem was *to worship;* to be present at one of the three great annual festivals of the Jewish religion. He was also on an errand of charity. He *came to bring alms to his nation and offerings.* He had been engaged for many months (as we learn from several of his Epistles) in making a collection among the Gentile Churches for the support of the poor and suffering in Judea. At Jerusalem, so far from offering any insult to the established religion, he had even consented to go through a rite of purification according to the Jewish Law. That was the object of his presence in the Temple. *They found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude nor with tumult.* And where, he asks, are the witnesses? A goodly array of prose-

cutors: but where are *the Jews from Asia* on whose evidence they rely? No; his real crime is not apostasy from the faith of his fathers; not irreverence towards the ritual or the religion of his nation; but on the very contrary, a strict adherence to a hope which that nation has forgotten, though its own Scriptures record it; the hope of a resurrection of the dead, built upon the attested fact that the promised Messiah has Himself risen.

Such is the substance of the defence. Two points in it have already secured by their importance a separate consideration; (1) St Paul's doctrine of a twofold resurrection; and (2) St Paul's perpetual self-discipline to have a conscience void of offence.

But by this time the cold impartiality of the magistrate, set to decide between what he regards as rival tenets of two sects of a superstitious religion, has satisfied itself that there is either no case against the prisoner, or certainly no urgency in its adjudication. Let both parties wait. *When Lysias the chief captain shall come down*, by whose authority the prisoner was sent to Cæsarea, Felix will resume the hearing. Meanwhile there need be no severity of treatment. Paul may have all freedom that is com-

patible with his detention, and may see any of his friends who care to visit him. But Felix went further. In this interval he *sent for Paul,* and, in company with his wife Drusilla, who, whatever her conduct, was still by profession as well as by birth a Jewess, *heard him concerning the faith in Christ.* It is at this point that the words of the text occur.

1. First then, what subjects did St Paul select as those most appropriate to his hearers? *He reasoned* (or *discoursed*) *concerning righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come.*

Many persons would have expected him to go at once to the Gospel; to open before these sinners, in their day of confidence and of unconcern, the blessed prospect of a free forgiveness, an entire sanctification, and everlasting life. We hear much said against what is called moral preaching. And certainly a moral Sermon may be a miserably dry and lifeless thing. And a Sermon which leaves Christ out of sight *must* be a dry and lifeless thing to a Christian congregation. But a moral Sermon need not leave Christ out of sight. A moral Sermon may be most deeply Christian. And, let me say, a moral Sermon—which knows its place, and de-

sires to be as the *schoolmaster unto Christ*—may be powerfully awakening. Many a careless heart, which treads underfoot the precious pearl of the Gospel, has been shaken to its foundation by the exhibition of moral consequences, by that reasoning which shows the wrath of God against sin, and reiterates in the inward ear the solemn admonition, *Be sure your sin will find you out.* There are first elements of universal truth, which must be declared, and must be enforced, and must be felt, before even the announcement of a Saviour can by possibility be valued. And it is just because we have learned these first principles so imperfectly, so confusedly, or so superficially, that our own course has been oftentimes so vague and inconsistent, our appreciation of the Gospel so inadequate, our love of Christ Himself so faint and cold and dead.

To a heathen governor, a cruel and licentious as well as unbelieving man, St Paul could not without folly have begun by proclaiming the fulness and freeness of the grace of Christ. There was as yet no accusing conscience at work within, to make the promise of forgiveness acceptable or indeed intelligible. It would have been indeed a *casting of pearls before*

swine, a *giving that which is holy unto the dogs*, to tell a man, in the moral state of Felix, of a God who *passes by iniquity, transgression, and sin*, and *keeps mercy for thousands* of the fallen. St Paul began at the other end of truth. He sought to lay a deep foundation, rather than to rear on the sand a showy superstructure. He selected three topics for this first discourse.

(1) He spoke of *righteousness*. Righteousness, in this sense, is the giving to all their due. It is the fulfilling of every relation in which we stand to others. It is the being a perfectly faithful son or father, brother or sister, husband or wife, subject or ruler, servant or master, or whatever else we may be, by duty and position, towards any other living person; yea, and towards God also. What a subject for discourse! how large, how deep, how instructive, how condemning! St Paul no doubt told Felix (as he had told him, by implication, in his earlier defence) that he had a monitor within, a natural conscience, telling him, in the great leading features at least, what was his bounden duty in every particular of inward and outward, of domestic and public life. His conscience told him that, when

he tempted away the wife Drusilla from her husband Azizus king of Emesa, he was doing a wicked and a criminal act, for which, sooner or later, an account was to be rendered. His conscience told him that, when he brought about the murder of Jonathan the high priest because he was offended with his unwelcome counsels, he was doing a treacherous and a barbarous act, for which, sooner or later, he must expect to give account. He was violating, in such case, one of those relations in which God, the universal Creator and the universal Judge, had placed him towards his brother men. In enunciating to him the first principles of morality in this one respect, St Paul was laying a deep and solid foundation for whatever he might afterwards have to say to him of the Gospel. So long as conscience was either asleep or silent upon such topics, there was no room for the safe or salutary entrance of a Gospel of forgiveness and Divine grace.

Would to God, my brethren, that this part of St Paul's address to Felix were wholly superfluous in a place calling itself Christian! Which of us needs not, in some particular, the trumpet-call to righteousness? to a fulfilment

of life's relations? to a *rendering to all their dues*, and even *to God the things that are God's?* Where is he amongst us, who is so without sin, in these first elements of faithfulness, that he could dare to cast the first stone at another? And yet we write ourselves Christians, and think that all we can need now is the consolation of the Gospel!

St Paul reasoned of righteousness.

(2) He went on to temperance. The word is important in its most obvious sense. O the miserable homes, O the yet more miserable hearts, in this town, at this moment, by reason of this one want, the want of temperance! Intemperance, as we commonly use that word, is of all vices the most degrading. It levels man with the beasts that perish: nay, far more, far worse, than this; for the brute creation obeys instinct, and instinct points to use, not to abuse. But the word temperance, as now used, falls below the meaning of the word employed by St Paul. That of which St Paul reasoned with Felix was the larger virtue of self-restraint, of self-command, generally. He taught him—still occupying the ground rather of nature and reason than of Revelation and the Gospel—that every man ought to be able to

command himself; to say No to appetite when it passes its just limit; to bridle inclination; to coerce lust; to say to himself, *This I will do, because it is right,* and, *This will I not do, because it is wrong.* This is temperance. It is the holding of the reins of conduct in the hand of the will, and the regulating of that will itself by the ordinance of reason and of God. The absence of this power, or the loss of it, is the cause of all the sins and of all the miseries which have made this world a scene of suffering and of desolation.

And yet, my brethren, I must again ask, even in a Christian congregation, which of us all holds the reins of action in his own hand, and guides them as religion, or even as reason, prompts? Alas! the weakness, the bondage, of the will is the very malady from which man suffers. We *cannot do the things that we would:* we are the slaves of another, even of that watchful, that ever restless enemy, who desires not our happiness but our ruin, and uses our own selves to work it out for each of us. Let us examine the question, each one of us, with reference either to the organs of our own body or to the faculties of our own mind, and too many of us must confess, with Felix, that

we are not our own masters; that we have not the absolute control either of thought or speech or act, but do every day things that we would not, and leave undone the things that we would.

St Paul reasoned of temperance.

(3) And then to one thus self-condemned; thus lying under the double charge of violating the relations of life in a thousand instances both of omission and of act, and also of having dropped the reins of the inner being, and forfeited that self-control which is the very life of man's life; the Apostle, advancing one step further, utters that terrible message, which the conscience within instantly re-echoes, of a judgment and a wrath to come. It may be doubted whether the expectation of a judgment is more a point of natural or of revealed religion. Certainly, if Revelation declares, conscience ratifies. Conscience reads in the revelation the confirmation of its own misgivings, and *sets to its seal that God is true.* The very scheme of this world, as we see it apart from Revelation, would be most imperfect, most incomprehensible, without a judgment. There must be some future rectification of existing inequalities: there must be some state or some

time in which the neglect of God, and the defiance of God, shall reap its fruits; in which the sufferings of His servants shall be redressed, and the triumphings of the wicked discomfited. But that truth which seems to us, in the retrospect, to have been an instinct and an intuition, is at least revealed and attested in the Gospel. *God hath appointed a day,* St Paul said before the Areopagus at Athens, *in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.*

2. Such was the discourse of St Paul in this first interview with Felix. And what was its effect? *As he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.*

Felix trembled. The magistrate, the judge, the oppressor, the profligate; before the prisoner, the powerless, the despised, but the man of God. Yes, the truth has great power. The voice of God, whether it be the voice of God in the Law or in the Gospel, in conscience or in Revelation, has great power. Men wonder

it has not more. If it were indeed God's voice, they say, it must have more. Doubtless it has often a hindrance in the human utterer. He presses it not as he ought: he exemplifies it not as he ought: he even utters it not as he ought. A poor, confused, lifeless thing is all that reaches the congregation from what ought to be the very storehouse of God's oracles: and he who takes the life out of it in his preaching, takes also the power out of it in his life. And thus the Gospel has oftentimes not even a chance. But it is very wonderful—it is a mark, I must think, of its Divine origin—that it has the power it has. Think what the power of resistance to it might be expected to be. Think what the influences of time and sense are: think what it is to be surrounded by a gay and giddy world: think what it is to have every energy tasked to the uttermost in the discharge of business or in the pursuit of pleasure: think what it is to have passions clamouring within for their gratification, and making it the direct interest of a human soul to forget God, to deny Christ, to disbelieve eternity: and then wonder only—for it is indeed a cause for wonder—not that the Gospel has so little power, but that it has

so much; wonder that so considerable an influence is exercised by it over human conduct; wonder, not less, that so many, who do not obey, fear the Gospel; that so many, as the minister of Christ reasons with them of righteousness and temperance and judgment to come, still, like Felix, tremble!

But this trembling is not a certain sign of good. It admits of being (as a Prophet has said) *healed slightly.* Many have trusted in the trembling. They have had convictions, they say, and they take conviction for conversion, and conversion for the whole of grace. They lay all the stress upon the having trembled. It made the Gospel pleasant to them: they *received it with joy:* and there the work ended. Alas! it was but just begun. Little do they know of the Christian life, with its joys and sorrows, its turnings and windings, its falls and risings again, its anxieties, its ambiguities, its continual precariousness: they expected to arrive without a journey, to win without a race, to conquer without a battle.

Felix trembled. But he found a short way —a way often trodden—to relief and respite. He said to the Apostle, *For the present go thy way: when* (or *if*) *I get an opportunity, I will*

summon thee. Thus he cut short the pain which he would not make remedial: and when he next met his teacher, a meaner thought had taken possession: *he sent for him,* but it was in the hope that he would give him money; that the prisoner might fee his judge for freeing him: and with such a motive at work, no wonder that the charm of the Gospel was counteracted: the sordid desire of gain, and from such a source, could not coexist with any aspiration after heaven: his chance was gone; forfeited by himself and sinned away. He proceeded on his downward course. Soon he was summoned to give an account to his imperial master of his unfaithful, his dishonest stewardship. And then he and his instructor parted, we must suppose, for ever: the light had gleamed once upon his path, but it now died away, and left the darkness thicker yet and gloomier and more hopeless than before.

It is a true parable. Every man has his opportunity; and if he misses it, it comes not again. Ours is the present: let us grasp it, and use it, and live by it, while we may!

Felix vanishes from the page of Inspiration: yet has his converse with the man of God left an impress upon that page for ever,

and thousands and tens of thousands owe their first convictions to the record of his opportunity and of his obduracy.

Dare we hope, my friends, that all of us have listened and feared? have felt conscience-pricked and stirred within, and have not, like Felix, deferred to act upon conviction? Which of us all has never said to the troublesome admonition, outward or from within; to the monitor, visible or invisible, who uttered it; *Go thy way for this time?* Has no Sermon ever sounded in our hearts with convincing force, and yet we have gone away to forget, to trifle with it, and to disobey? How have we reckoned upon prolonged life, upon renewed and repeated opportunities of fetching back at will the discarded rebuker or exhorter! *When I get an opportunity, I will summon thee. Not now; not now: I am busy, I am at ease, I am indisposed, I am unfit: I have bought a piece of ground, I have married a wife: the occupations of life, or the cares of life, the affections of life, or the pleasures of life, are too strong for me at present: but soon perhaps the opportunity will come: I shall be less busy, or I shall be less happy, or I shall be less prosperous, or I shall be less careworn: perhaps I shall be sorrowful*

some day; perhaps some day I shall be sick: then will I call for thee! Yes, so it is: such is the tale of life throughout its generations: *Soon, but not now: not while time is ours; not while it can do any good to listen; not while it might guide the life, while it might mitigate care; not while it might counteract or overbear temptation: but some day, some fancied day, when I shall be ill, and yet not too ill—when death will be in sight, and yet at some distance—then will I turn to God: to-morrow, not today; peradventure, not for certain: no, not for certain; for what is certain on earth save the moment that is? Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*

Be sure that whatever awakens a serious thought in us, even for a moment, is a voice from God; and that to trifle with it, or to delay acting upon it, is to trifle and to procrastinate with God. Be sure too, that, in what form soever the call come to us, whether as a warning or as an invitation, whether as a reproof for sin or a promise of blessing, it is equally in either case, if we will listen to it, a call of love, and he who puts it away or puts it off, puts away or puts off his own happiness.

God grant that this may not be a last opportunity, and a lost opportunity, for any of us! How many such opportunities has God already given to each one of us! Nothing can bring back to us those that have been wasted: O let not this one be wasted too!

LECTURE XVI.

THE SINNER HIS OWN ENEMY.

ACTS XXVI. 14.

It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

PORCIUS Festus succeeded Antonius Felix in the government of Judæa. Two years already had St Paul been a prisoner at Cæsarea: and the change of governor made no immediate change in his condition or circumstances. He seems, however, to have passed from the hands of a magistrate at once immoral, mean, and unprincipled, into those of an equitable and not unamiable man, desirous to protect him from violence, and to recognize the rights of his citizenship. After three days spent at Cæsarea, the seat of the civil government, Festus paid a visit to Jerusalem; the centre

of chief interest, in reference alike to the history and to the religion of the remarkable people over which he was set to rule. There he was beset by applications regarding the case of St Paul. The unsleeping malice of the Jewish persecutors, hoping something from the inexperience of a new governor, planned a petition for the prisoner's removal from Cæsarea to Jerusalem, as if for a further and more convenient hearing; in reality with a view to his assassination by the way. Festus could see no reason for the change of place. The accusers might accompany him to Cæsarea in a few days, and there he would investigate the case without delay.

But this renewed trial ended like the former. A number of unproved charges were brought against the prisoner: charges, as before—to judge by the answer—of crimes against the Law of Moses, against the Temple, and against the Emperor; in other words, of heresy, of sacrilege, and of treason. But the utterance of the charmed words, *I appeal unto Cæsar*, transferred the case from the subordinate to the highest tribunal: a Roman citizen had claimed to be heard before the Roman Emperor: and Festus, after some conference with

his assessors on the only possible question—whether there was anything in the particular case to exempt it from the operation of the general rule—closed the matter by the decisive judgment, *Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar? unto Cæsar shalt thou go.* The prisoner was remanded into custody, until an opportunity should occur for sending him to Rome.

In the interval Festus was visited by a person well qualified, by position and education, to throw some light upon a case full of perplexities for Festus. King Agrippa, a great grandson of Herod the Great; son of that Herod whose persecution of the Church and whose mysterious end are related in the 12th chapter; arrived at Cæsarea with his sister Berenice: and after many days—for the despised Christian prisoner must wait till there was nothing else to be spoken of—*when they had been there many days,* Festus mentioned Paul's case to his illustrious guest, and described the difficulty which he had found in bringing to it an intelligent judgment. *When the accusers stood up, they brought against him none accusation of such things as I supposed; but had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was*

dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. The curiosity of Agrippa was awakened by the description. *I would also,* he said, *hear the man myself.*

I fear we must divest our minds of all traditional interest in the character of this king Agrippa. He was a cold-hearted voluptuary. His long life—for he lived till Trajan's reign; outlived by many years the fall of Jerusalem; outlived all but one, if not every one, of the Apostles—presents no point on which the Christian eye can fasten with hope or with satisfaction. The character of the *almost persuaded,* of the *almost Christian,* however common, finds (as we shall hereafter see) no real type in him. Roman satirists are busy with the terrible scandals of his private character. If he knew, if (as St Paul says) he believed, the Prophets, it was the worse for him. If he knew, he did not.

And the life of his companion who shall describe? The briefest summary is the most decent. Bernice was first married to her uncle, Herod king of Chalcis. After his death she lived under circumstances of great suspicion with her own brother, this king Agrippa. She was a second time married, to Polemon, king

of Cilicia; but soon left him, and returned to her brother. She afterwards lived, in unholy union, with the Emperor Vespasian, and with his son, the Emperor Titus.

These were the people before whom St Paul was here called, to make his defence. Strange, marvellous contrast, between the prisoner and the judges! It was needful to indicate it, that we might understand the full meaning of that courtesy, of that patience, of that earnestness, with which the cause is pleaded and the subsequent dialogue maintained.

Festus summons Paul before Agrippa, that he may have something to say in his despatch to Nero. Agrippa would wile away an hour of a somewhat tedious visit by listening to a curious story. The profligate Bernice, worthy sister to the adulteress Drusilla of whom we read in the 24th chapter, would display her vanity before a distinguished concourse, and amuse herself with a tale of sufferings in which she has no concern. Paul alone of all that assembly has a clear purpose in this life, and a bright hope in regard to that which is to come.

With the same truthful courtesy which we

noticed in him before Felix, he begins by acknowledging the competence of his principal hearer. King Agrippa knows by long use the customs, and is experienced in the questions, of the Jewish nation. He can enter with intelligence into matters which without such training would be meaningless. For the second time we have here from St Paul's own lips a narrative of his life and of his change. In speaking in the 22nd chapter before a tumultuous audience at Jerusalem, he naturally and skilfully puts forward such points as would rather conciliate than outrage their prepossessions and prejudices. The narrative is the same in substance, yet differently presented. Such is the naturalness of Holy Scripture that it seems as though it were indifferent about a superficial consistency. So it is ever with truth: its harmony is often veiled and hidden; while falsehood sometimes betrays itself, to a practised ear, by a studied and ostentatious uniformity.

He begins, however, here as there, by a strong assertion of his original and of his persistent Jewish orthodoxy. *After the most straitest sect of our religion I lived* in youth *a Pharisee. And now,* he proceeds, even now, it is for the national hope that he is here brought

to trial. It is not he who has been a renegade. He is an Israelite still; tenacious of a hope and of a promise for which others are ignorantly, vainly, blindly looking, because they will not see that it is come. Such was he once: he thought once, like them, that duty called him to oppose Jesus of Nazareth. No persecutor of the Christians so keen once as he. *Many of the saints did I shut up in prison. When they were being put to death, I gave my vote against them. I punished them oft in every synagogue. I sought to compel them to blaspheme.* Nay, unsatisfied with home efforts, *I persecuted them even unto strange (foreign) cities.*

Such was his course—known and notorious—till the very moment of his great change. He was at that moment on a persecuting journey. Charged with a public mission from the chief priests of Israel, he was at that time on his journey to the far Damascus, to bring the Christians there *bound unto Jerusalem.* What changed him? Was any sudden impulse of tenderness, any weak vacillation, any lurking hesitation about truth or duty, likely to upset resolutions so fixed, or to convert him to a new opinion offering nothing (to him) but

reproach, disgrace, and ruin? The supposition is monstrous. Never was a man so pledged, so committed, to a particular course: and never was a revolution so complete as that which changed him to the opposite.

How was it then wrought? By no deception of the senses, such as dream or nightly vision might bring with it: the hour was noon, and the place was the neighbourhood of a city. A light, distinguishable from the midday glare of an Eastern sun, was visible both to him and his companions. All were stricken to the earth by the blaze of that glory. And then he alone—all heard a sound, but to him alone by himself did the voice intelligibly address itself —*he heard a voice speaking to him*—speaking in a known language, even the sacred Hebrew tongue—and saying, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the goad. Who art Thou, Lord?* was his terrified answer: and the voice spake again, and said, *I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.*

We cannot hurry—even if it be for the third time—through the deeply instructive narrative of a Conversion to which the world itself owes (under God) its Christianity. And therefore I pause for this night upon the few words

read to you as the text, and contained (as we have now heard) in the first call of Jesus Christ from heaven to a blasphemer and a persecutor below, *It is hard for thee to kick against the goad.* When we look into them, we shall find much that is suitable to ourselves, and appropriate, I think, to the first Sunday evening of a new and as yet undeveloped year.

The first glance at the words shows us a proverb. Even from heaven, God, if He speaks at all, must adapt His speech to man's usages. The risen and ascended Saviour spake, not on earth only—He speaks also from heaven—in proverbs, in parables, in dark sayings. His *thoughts are not as our thoughts:* but His words, if they are to carry instruction in them, must be even as our words.

And the proverb before us is taken from common, from the very commonest life of man. Like so many of our Lord's similitudes in the Gospels, it is derived from agricultural life; from the experience of a husbandman ploughing or driving cattle. With a goad in his hand, headed by a long sharp spike of iron, he drives before him the reluctant animal which would loiter or deviate from its way. In the

obstinacy of an untamed will, the *bullock unaccustomed to the yoke* will even kick against his driver; and then the iron, otherwise harmless, enters, and enters deeply, into the recalcitrant foot. Which of the two is harmed by it? Where is the folly, the harm, the pain? Not in the driver, but in the driven: the animal suffers for his rebellion against the will which, unresisted, meant only good.

Even thus it is in that region which the parable symbolized. In human life, in the affairs of the soul, in the things of moral and spiritual good and evil, there is a hand which directs, and there is also a will which it seeks to guide. The directing hand is God's, and the directed will is man's. So long as the human will moves along the straight furrow of duty, obeying the revealed Word and yielding to the Holy Spirit of its Maker, so long the goad of punishment is unfelt, because there is a unity between the Divine purpose and the human conduct. But if man will refuse the Divine influence, and stop *or hedge aside from the direct forthright* of obedience, the guiding impulse must become a painful goad of discipline, and resistance must be coerced and (if necessary) punished into acquiescence.

It is hard for thee, a creature and a subject, *to kick against the goad* of Divine discipline: hard for thee, infatuated, and suicidal; inasmuch as the hand over thee is stronger than thou, and, if not in love and tenderness as He would, then *with fury poured out* as He would not, must God *rule over thee.*

Such is the maxim by which our Lord once arrested from heaven the mad career of a persecutor, and turned him, under the influence of grace, into a servant and an Apostle. May its application be so blessed this night, as to correct some rebellious will, and bring back some resisting spirit into that docility and that obedience which is evermore happiness, rest, and peace!

1. *The way of transgressors is hard.* So speaks *Solomon, son of David, king of Jerusalem.* He had found it so. Bitterly no doubt had he contrasted the promise of his beginning with the fulfilment of his end. And so speaks the Lord Jesus Christ in a proverb communicated from heaven. *It is hard for thee to kick against the goad* which drives.

The young man thinks it a sign of independence, thinks it a mark of freedom, to forget God that made him, and to walk in the way of

his own heart. He learns to forsake the rule of his father, and to despise the law of his mother. He forms new associates: his habits become more and more such as a Christian parent would mourn over, such as a Christian home must cast out. Is he happy? Does he find his new life a freedom? Are his new ways ways of pleasantness, are his chosen paths peace? He tries to think them so: he calls them so in his hours of mirth: he doubts not that they will be so as he becomes more at home in them. But somehow—he cannot account for it—he feels himself in reality to be more in bondage than ever. The old rules of his home, the primitive principles of his parents, if they were restraints, at least had no sting in them: burdensome perhaps in their observance, certainly they never tormented him with after remorse. But now, these *pleasures of sin,* not only are they shortlived, they are anxious in the indulgence, and they are torturers in the retrospect. His conscience is never quiet in him: it is ever warning, ever reproving, ever lashing him. And when sickness comes, when grey hairs are upon him, when death is imminent; how then? Does he not become painfully conscious that he has

broken the law of his being; that he has not shaken off the yoke of creation, but only driven sharply into his foot the goad of a rule which was too strong for him? Yes, it is the old tale once more repeated: sin becomes a cruel tyrant to the soul which yields to it: conscience wields a scourge over the back that is turned upon it: and judgment, even in this life, asserts the supremacy of right, and prophesies the coming of a time when in God's heaven and earth shall dwell only righteousness.

Young men—young women—whose course is yet unshaped as for good or evil, be persuaded of this; that, for mercy or else for judgment, there is a God over you; if you will have it so, a God of love; if you will not have it so, then at least a God of power! *It is hard for thee* now, as well as dangerous eventually, to *kick against the pricks.*

2. Yet more nearly do we approach the first application of the proverb, when we speak of those who are kicking against the goad of a fatherly discipline. If those who resist God's Law find it *an evil thing and bitter* to have done so, not less they who resist that individual guidance which through smooth paths or rough is directing them towards an end.

There are many in this congregation who do not understand and do not love the method by which God is training them for Himself. They are denied many things which they desire: they are subjected to many things which they dislike. The very gifts which they most value, be they what they may; gifts of fortune, or of person, or of affection, or of success; are either never in their view, or are snatched away just as they would grasp them. Do not say that this is no trial! A large part of human suffering is made up of cruel disappointment. When they seemed to have even attained, the prize was wrenched from them. When they even did attain, the coveted fruit has turned to ashes in the mouth. By these means the world was made a world of nothingness to them. Perhaps they were too eager for it. They were of that nature which would have been satisfied to *sit by the fleshpots and eat bread to the full.* And therefore the discipline needful for them was an Exodus. Desert life, a wilderness alone with God, Sinai with God speaking from it, was necessary to their soul's safety. And yet scarcely were they in it, when they began to find fault. There was no bread: their *soul loathed this light bread,* the bread of eternity and of the

spirit. There was no water: the smitten rock yielded only a spiritual supply; and they were athirst for something sweeter, more luscious, more earthly. Thus again and again they were rebellious against the hand that guided, and forced it to become a hand that drove. God would not let them alone. He would guide, or He would coerce. Why? *Even because He had a favour unto them.* To kick against that hand, even if it was forced by their waywardness to hold a goad, was rebellion as much against happiness as against strength.

I address some tonight who are in definite trouble. They are under a providence which they cannot understand: they have lost a friend who was all to them: they dwell in a clouded home: *the light is darkened in the* very *heavens thereof.* Yet, my friend, *it is the Lord. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things. Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? or thy work, He hath no hands? Humble yourselves* rather *under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time. It is hard for thee,* painful now, eventually ruinous, *to kick against the goad.*

3. There is yet a further use of the Divine proverb before us; and it is that in which it was originally spoken to St Paul himself.

St Paul was not a transgressor, in the sense of a lover of sin or a violator of conscience. He was entirely moral, thoroughly conscientious, living after the strictest sect of his religion, yea, *compassing sea and land to make one proselyte.* How could he be said to be kicking against the goad? For this one reason: that he was refusing the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He saw not his own sinfulness. He knew not his own want of a Saviour. He was not willing that others should trust in One whom he knew not. It was for this sin that he was accused of persecuting Jesus; arrested on his way to Damascus; stricken to the earth in deep penitence; and at last led forward into life by a way that he knew not.

Can there be any here present, whose sin is the sin of Saul of Tarsus? Certainly there are those in this age—and many of them—who are willing to take everything of the Gospel save the very Gospel itself; moral men, conscientious men, earnest men, self-denying and laborious men; men who love goodness of life, and cherish purity of heart, and admire God's holiness, and

even recognize with all honour the character and the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ; yet who suffer themselves to repudiate altogether the revelation of the forgiveness of sin through the atonement made for us by a Saviour, and of the renewal of the heart within by the personal operation of a Holy and Divine Spirit. These things *are foolishness to them.* And the very same man who is all gentleness and all charity in every other aspect, will sometimes become all suspicion and all bitterness towards those who preach and receive these Gospel revelations as the very life of life. The morality of the Gospel, and the devotion of the Gospel, and the charity of the Gospel, these he will receive; because reason itself and conscience, if they could not originate, can at least echo and confirm them: but that which lies under these, that which, if Scripture and experience can be trusted, furnishes the security for morality, and the impulse to devotion, and the motive for charity—even the sense of obligation to a crucified and living Saviour, the love of a Person *who was dead and whom Paul affirms to be alive,* the reconciliation of the heart and will to God by the acceptance of the proclamation of a free forgiveness—this he cannot compre-

hend, cannot see the need of, and will not receive. That Paul did wrong in persecuting, we can understand: but that Paul should have needed conversion when he was already conscientious, or could honestly call himself *the chief of sinners* merely because at that time he knew not of a Saviour, this, if we speak plainly, is an offence to us; exaggerated language, or else mystical and unreal.

My friends, depend upon it, even you, while you are thus, are, like St Paul, kicking against a goad. You do want a Saviour; want Him for complete forgiveness, want Him for entire cleansing of the conscience, want Him for strength and comfort and grace in daily life. And He is, and has His eye upon you, and His hand over you, and is guiding your destinies, and (if you be such as I have imagined you) is preparing you, I would fain hope, for a glorious illumination, if you only submit yourselves to it and refuse it not. Why then will you keep out of your heart that bright light? Why will you compel Him to drive, who would lead and guide? Why must the foot pierce itself upon the compelling and coercing goad, when to you the words might be fulfilled even now in all their tenderness and in all

their sweetness, *Thou art with me: Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me?* Bow yourself to that discipline of the heavenly wisdom, which, if at first it be mortifying to human pride and humbling to natural intellect, soon brings after it a sense of harmony to the soul and tranquillity to the life, attesting its origin from above by its suitableness to the wants of man. Prefer not a life of doubt and of loneliness, when *the Sun of righteousness* is ready to *arise* upon you *with healing in His wings,* and to fulfil in you the words of His own most blessed promise, *I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*

Holy Scripture gives us examples of every kind of direction, from that of the driving goad to that of the guiding eye.

Mark the order. (1) There is the sharp iron for the refractory. *It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.* (2) There is the *bit and bridle* for the unreasoning. *Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouths must be held in with bit and bridle.* (3) There is the voice of the shepherd, known and loved by the docile flock. *When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth*

before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. (4) There is the guidance, not even of voice, but of the eye only, which suits the ready, anticipating will of the entirely tractable and sympathizing child. *I will guide thee with mine eye.* To kick against the goad is the extreme of disobedience; to watch the guiding eye, to wait not for the word or the sign, much less for the spur of authority, is the perfection of obedience.

In all senses, may that last be ours! Let us watch the Saviour's eye; let us be beforehand with the word which commands, much more with the bridle which enforces, or with the goad which compels. Let ours be the sympathy of affection; the gratitude which loves much, because it has been much forgiven. So shall the journey of life be for us tracked by mercy, and its end rest with Him *whom, not having seen, we have loved* with a love stronger than temptation, stronger than sin, stronger than death.

LECTURE XVII.

THE WORK OF MAN AND THE GIFT OF GOD.

ACTS XXVI. 17, 18.

I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

MUCH preaching and much hearing is utterly wasted, for lack of a clear purpose and a definite aim. We do not set before ourselves a goal which must be reached, or a prize which must be won. We speak for the chance of doing some good: we listen for the chance of getting some good: but what that good is, or how that chance can be calculated; by what

appointed means we may attain what proposed and destined end; are questions which too little exercise the thoughts either of the minister or of his hearers.

Let the words spoken eighteen centuries ago by Jesus from heaven—words which made Paul an Apostle, and which are still preserved for our own guidance in the Scriptures of truth —be profitable, under God, this night, for making our vagueness definite and our vacillation resolute!

You have heard that remarkable proverb, spoken from heaven in a language of earth—spoken by Jesus to His persecutor; by the risen Saviour to the ignorant but zealous Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, now entering Damascus on a mission of sword and fire—*It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.* Hard for thee, a creature, to fight against the Creator; hard for thee, a sinner, to persecute the Saviour; hard for thee, a man with a conscience, to stifle the voice and to quench the light within; hard for thee, a dying man on his way to judgment, to *treasure up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*

The work of years is undone in a moment,

and the bold self-righteous persecutor is become as a child in the grasp of a giant. *Who art Thou, Lord?* It was a Person who spoke; and if a Person speaks from heaven, then must it be important to know who He is and why He speaks. *Who art thou, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.*

It was needless for St Paul, speaking before his present audience, to distinguish accurately between that which was spoken outside the city on the instant, and that which was communicated afterwards whether by the message of Ananias or personally to himself. In the narrative of the 9th chapter, the words are, *Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.* Here, in a more condensed account of the transaction as a whole, the commission is given at once, and the disclosures of three days are (as it were) crowded into one.

But rise and stand upon thy feet: for I appeared unto thee for this purpose, to prepare (or *appoint*) *thee* as *a minister* (*servant*), *and a witness both of* these *things which thou didst* now *see and of things in* (*as to,* or *for the communication of*) *which I will appear unto thee.* An Apostle must be a witness. He

is not sent to say what he thinks, or what he has discovered by reflection and reasoning, concerning Divine truth and human duty: he is sent to give evidence; to say, *Thus and thus have I seen; I speak that I do know; I have seen Jesus Christ, He has spoken to me, and I speak from Him.* St Paul was to give evidence, wherever he went, a living man to living men, of what he had now seen, in this first revelation to him of the Saviour, and of what he should hereafter see of Christ in further and fuller communications with Him as time went on.

Delivering thee out of (from among) the people of Israel, *and the Gentiles;* rescuing thee, by my protecting presence, from the perils which shall beset thy ministry whether among Jews or Gentiles; *unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and* from *the authority of Satan unto God, that they may receive dismissal of sins and inheritance among those who have been consecrated by faith in me.*

We have here three things.

1. And first, the direct work of the Christian ministry. *I send thee to open their eyes.* The work is described, and the power is in the sending. Christ is all. He mocks not, by

sending sinful man to sinful men, weak and unaided and alone. If He sends, He will also give the power. Therefore we may look at the work, and not be perpetually repeating that it is a work above man. *I send thee, to open their eyes.*

So then, before Him who looks on it from heaven, humanity lies as it were sleeping. The eye is closed: the eye of the understanding, the eye of the heart, the eye of the soul. Very remarkable is the contrast between this state and the tempter's promise. *God doth know,* he said as he first tempted, *that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods.* He prevailed: man did eat: and it came true. *The eyes of them both were opened.* But to what? *They knew that they were naked.* That opening of the eyes was to a consciousness of shame. To everything else, to everything save wretchedness, it was not an opening but a closing. As Christ looks on from heaven, He sees man not open-eyed, but blind. He sends Paul *to open their eyes.* That was his office. That, if we be at all Christ's ministers, is our office too.

It was the first thing done for Paul himself in his Conversion. *Ananias came, and stood,*

and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. Look up, the word is: *see again! And the same hour I looked up upon him.* What Saul needed, what Saul received, that (scarcely in figure) man needs now: to be bidden, in Christ's name, to *look up;* to *see again;* to have his eyes opened.

The same eye may be opened to some things and closed to others. The very clearness of its vision for some things—say, for near objects—may be a mark of its dulness as to others, as to the more distant. A man may be quick to discern his own rights, his own interests, his own comforts and pleasures, in the life that is; and yet utterly mistaken, or absolutely indifferent, as to his highest interest, as to his truest happiness, as to his plainest duty, as a being born for immortality. O how dull oftentimes is the man of business, the man of politics, the man of literature or of philosophy, when the thing presented to him is the work of Christ or the hope of heaven! He too needs to have his eyes opened.

And this is the office, we here read, of the Christian ministry. This is the object of preaching. This is the end proposed to the

diligent pastor, as he visits the whole or the sick placed under his charge. *I send thee to open their eyes.*

And this, you see further, by a testimony; as Christ's witness. If he cannot say, as St Paul could say, *Listen to me, for I have seen Jesus Christ;* at least he should be able to say, *Listen to me, for I know Jesus Christ; I have heard His voice in my soul, I have talked with Him in my soul, and He by His Spirit has set me free from the law of sin and death.* Yes, it is here that we fail. We bring a hearsay message. We have read of this, we have been told of that: others have said that it was so, and that they have tried it, and that they were saved by it: but we have not felt it ourselves, we have not tried it and found it effectual ourselves, and therefore we have no evidence to bring of facts known, of things seen. Alas! it is too much with us, as it was with the prophets of old, who *prophesied out of their own hearts, followed their own spirit, and had seen nothing.*

But St Paul had seen Jesus Christ, and was sent by Him to the work; the work of opening eyes by giving evidence concerning

Jesus Christ. Whoever listened to him received sight. The light was offered, was presented to him, for acceptance or else for rejection.

My friends, in a sense, and in a true sense, all of us have at least seen the light. In a Christian land, within a Christian Church, it can no longer be said of us that, *if we are blind, we have no sin. Light,* the true light, *is come into the world,* and even upon us it has shined. But the Gospel tells of some who *loved darkness rather than light:* and it also tells us why; *because their deeds were evil;* because they would not let the light shine into their dark corners, and make the whole heart and the whole life (as the Scripture says again) to be *full of light.* Thus we pass to a second point.

2. The work is, opening the eyes by a communication of light; by a testimony concerning Christ. But that work itself has a further object; in which not the minister, but the hearer, must be the agent. It is expressed thus. *That they may turn from darkness to light, and from the authority of Satan unto God.*

That they may turn. Turning, or conver-

sion—for it is the same word—follows upon the opening of the eyes. The communication of light, by the faithful preaching of the Gospel, is the work of another: but this turning is (under God) a man's own work. A minister may enlighten, but he cannot convert. That is (under God) an act of the will, of the individual will, consequent upon conviction. *I see that this is true. I see that Christ died, that Christ lives. I see that sin is sinful, and that holiness is duty. I see that forgiveness is promised, and that the Holy Spirit is promised. I see that prayer is man's privilege, and that whosoever asks shall have. Now therefore, seeing the light, I must turn to it. The impediment is in me, and the power to remove it is offered. Therefore I awake and arise, and Christ shall give me light.* This is conversion. It is the man himself turning from darkness to light. By a strong effort, the whole ability for which is of God, but is given in the using, the man says, and acts upon it, *This which is false and deceptive and wicked shall be mine no more. This which is true and holy and good shall be mine (in the strength of Christ) henceforward. I will walk in this light which He has brought to me. I will accept this blessedness which He*

offers me: this twofold blessedness, of a forgiven past and a cleansed future. That is conversion. O how unlike the dreams of many; who have mistaken (at the very best) the *opening of the eyes* for the *turning to the light;* more often, a startled, feverish, fleeting feeling, for a deliberate self-surrender, self-dedication, self-sacrifice to a forgiving Saviour and a holy God! Conversion without change is a contradiction in terms.

But we must not exaggerate man's power, or forget the difficulty of that change to which the Gospel calls us. And therefore it is written further, *and from the authority of Satan unto God.* We bless God for the merciful sympathy which breathes in that word. Yes, Satan has great authority. Let a man honestly turn from darkness to light, and then, if never before, he will become conscious of the strong gripe of evil. Habits of life, habits of mind, habits of feeling, are not changed in a day. The conviction may be strong, that thus it should be: but alas! the first day of a Christian life reveals to a man his fallen state, as years of careless living have never revealed it. *When he would do good, evil is present with him.* Hitherto he thought himself free. He thought

that he lived thus and not thus, because so it pleased him. Now he sees that that fancied freedom itself was a bondage, and that a gilded chain may be a chain of iron still.

Let him turn then, not only from the darkness to the light, but also from the authority of Satan unto God. There is a stronger, just One stronger, than *the strong man armed:* to Him let him come, with Him let him abide, and he shall be made and he shall be kept free. *O Thou who didst cause the light to shine out of darkness, shine first in our hearts; and then cause Thou us to turn to the light from all darkness, and to Thee Thyself, who art both Light and Strength, from the bondage of that hard taskmaster who has too long kept us under his cruel yoke. Lift thou up upon us the light of Thy countenance, and deliver us from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God!*

3. *That they may turn:* and then, *that they may receive.* But the two things are not so much consecutive as coordinate. The one expresses man's part; the turning of the will and of the life to light and God. The other expresses God's part in the work of salvation; *that they may receive,* as soon as they turn,

in the very act of that turning, two things; *forgiveness of sins*, and *inheritance among the sanctified.*

(1) *Forgiveness, remission, dismissal, of sins.* I know how lightly sin can sit upon the conscience of a transgressor. He has only to keep out of the light, to stand aloof from God, to close his eyes alike to the Word and to the Hand which he is resisting; and a sinner may travel smoothly enough along a considerable stage of life's journey. But let the light penetrate; let sickness come, let pain, let sorrow: nay, even these things may not do it; but let conviction come, let one of the thousand arrows which are abroad in God's spiritual kingdom pierce him sharply between the joints of his harness: and then see whether it is an easy thing to bear, or an easy thing to escape, that sense of sin; that living, burning presence of accusing thoughts; that flaming, searing catalogue of evil things done and good left undone! If it be true, as men say, that nature has no forgiveness of sins; that the body of man and the life of man must still and for ever be *found out* by iniquities long past, long repented of, or long forgotten; how much more does this magnify the

unspeakable gift of God in His Gospel, in which the gracious proclamation stands first and midst and last also, *Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this Man,* Jesus Christ, *is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.* He who heartily turns receives at once forgiveness, yea (for it is the very meaning of forgiveness) dismissal, of sins. That which he has done wrong shall not be remembered against him. *His iniquity is forgiven, his sin is covered.* God has *hidden His face* (as it were) *from his sins, and blotted out all his iniquities.*

Friends and brethren, is it not worth your while to accept such a Gospel? Where, save in Christ, will you find a dismissal of sins? Who else, save Christ alone, even professes to have *borne your griefs and carried your sorrows?* to have *made reconciliation for iniquity,* and purchased for sinners a perfect righteousness?

(2) This in the present: this, in the time that is. And even the second thing spoken of is not all future. *An inheritance among the sanctified.* Dismissal of the past: and now an inheritance. Properly, *a lot;* and so an allotment; a portion falling to one by lot. It may

remind us of those chapters of the Book of Joshua, in which we read of the assignment by lot to the tribes of Israel of their inheritance in the land of Canaan. And so we read in the Book of Psalms, by an employment of the same figure, *The lot is fallen unto me in a fair ground: yea, I have a goodly heritage. A portion* then *among the sanctified.* It is almost the very expression of the 20th chapter: *Able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. Giving thanks unto the Father,* St Paul says to the Colossians, *who hath made us meet to be partakers*—more exactly, *qualified us for our share —of the inheritance of the saints in light.* The inheritance itself waits to be bestowed: but there is an earnest and a foretaste of it now. *Ye were sealed,* St Paul says to the Ephesians, *with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession;* until the actual redemption, by resurrection, of the bodies (as already of the souls) of His people.

A lot, or *portion,* then, *among the sanctified.* A secure place among the saints. And meanwhile, at once, an earnest of that blessedness; even the possession of that Holy Spirit

in this life, of whom it is written, once again, in the 8th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, *If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.* May we not say then, briefly, that the twofold gift here spoken of as the reward of turning to God, is (1) the gift of a free forgiveness, and (2) the gift of the sealing Spirit? *The kingdom of God* itself *is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.*

And who then are *the sanctified? The sanctified* are, in other words, *the consecrated;* those whom God has taken to be His own; to be His wholly; free from the contaminations of sin, and from the profanenesses of the world. My friends, the thing spoken of is not an attainment of man, but it is a gift of God. The word denotes not those who have made themselves holy, but those whom God has set apart for Himself by anointing them, as His kings and priests, with the Holy Ghost. This is that of which St John writes, in the 1st chapter of the Revelation, *Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father;*

to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. We all have received the sign and pledge of His consecration in Baptism: which of us has the reality of it? Which of us is so living as if he belonged to God only? refusing the suggestions of the devil, mastering the solicitations of the flesh, rejecting alike the flatteries and the mandates of the world, because he feels himself to be another's; because he desires to live, only and wholly, to Him who died for him and rose again? That man—is he not here tonight?—has upon him not only the name but the reality of God's consecration: the anointing oil is fresh upon his brow, the unction of the Holy One is full upon his heart.

And there is yet one thought, and one word, more. *By faith,* our Lord says, *that is in me. By faith in me.* Wonderful words! We may read them with *sanctified; sanctified by faith in me:* or we may read them with *receive; receive forgiveness and inheritance by faith in me.* He who speaks from heaven, still, even as when He spake on earth, makes faith everything. *From faith to faith. Therein* (in the Gospel) *is the righteousness of God revealed, from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.* Is it not so? Is it not

according to our faith that we grow in grace? Is it not according to the vitality or else the deadness of our spiritual sight of Christ—for that is faith—that we either conquer sin, practise love, rise above earth, live for eternity; or else, the opposite of these things, are tied and bound with the chain of sense, and grovel hopelessly among the things that are but for a moment? Yes, if we could but live in the sight of the Invisible One, we should also live our consecration. *This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*

The words now dwelt upon might have filled many Sermons. A poor superficial survey of them is all that I have attempted. But they have in them the very kernel and substance of the Gospel. The Fall and the Redemption; man as he is by nature, and man as he is by grace; the work of the minister, the work of the hearer, and the work of God; the end proposed, a heavenly inheritance, and the means of attaining it, faith in a Saviour; all this, and more than this, lies here, hidden or else unveiled, before us: *He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.*

LECTURE XVIII.

FESTUS AND AGRIPPA.

ACTS XXVI. 24—29.

And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

For the king knoweth of these things; before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

WE have here before us three characters strongly marked, and characteristically expressing themselves. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Sermons have been preached on that long text which I have just read to you, making these their three heads of description and application, The careless scoffer, The almost Christian, The man of God.

And there are indeed in all times these three classes of men living upon earth, and probably present in the congregation. And they ought to be defined, addressed, dealt with, for their own edification, or for that of others. That discernment of spirits which is no longer a gift for exposure is still a gift for introspection: and it is one office of the ministry so to depict, from Scripture and from experience, the shapes and forms of human character, that, without one presumptuous word, saying, *Thou, or thou, art the man, the secrets of the heart* may yet be *made manifest* within it, and the hearer *falling down on*

his face may *worship God,* and confess that He is still, as of old, present in His Word and in His Church.

A closer examination will modify the ordinary view of one at least of these three characters. God grant that, if it be so, the lesson to be derived from it may only be changed, not lost!

St Paul has been explaining himself before Festus and Agrippa, in preparation for being transferred to the hearing of the Emperor. Festus wishes to have something to say about him in the despatch which he must send with him to Rome. He knows that Agrippa is intimately acquainted with Jewish superstitions; himself, by profession, a believer in the Jewish Scriptures. He hopes for assistance from him in understanding the case. And Agrippa, with something perhaps of that well-bred complaisance which leads people on a visit to affect an interest in that which interests their host, and something (it may be) also of a more genuine curiosity as to the story of an eccentric and extraordinary man, lends himself to the wish of Festus, and, with much of the pomp and circumstance of a regular trial, calls upon the Christian prisoner to answer for himself.

We must not enter again into the particulars of that defence. It contained first of all a strong assertion of Jewish orthodoxy. *It is I—it is not my accusers—who adhere to the faith of my fathers. For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. Once I interpreted that faith as they do. None so bitter once as I against the name and the discipleship of Jesus. I was a persecutor. I took long journeys to persecute. I was on a persecuting mission at the moment of my great change. How that change came to me, you shall hear. I was not predisposed to it: every single habit of my life, every fixed and rooted principle of my mind, was against it. Yet I was convinced, I was converted, I was changed. And how? By the direct intervention and interposition of Him whom I was declaring to be a dead man. He stopped me, He spake to me, He commissioned and He sent me. Take into account the man and the life; take into account the circumstances preceding, attending, and following; remember what I was, and what I am; see me changed from a persecutor into an Apostle; behold me giving ease and fame, liberty and life, in the maintenance of a faith which once I set myself to destroy;*

and you cannot say there is nothing in it. Now you have what you wanted: somewhat to write about me to your lord. These are the causes of all this hostility. It is for believing what I know, and witnessing what I have seen, concerning Christ the hope of Israel, that the Jews seized and would kill me. But God has thus far helped me. I continue unto this day firm in the revelations of Moses and the Prophets, concerning Him who by resurrection from the dead should become both a light to lighten the Gentiles, and also the glory of His people Israel.

It is at this point that the dialogue of the text interrupts the progress of the defence. It was prophesied of Christ in His earliest infancy that the effect of His coming would be *that the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed.* It is by men's treatment of Christ, even more than by ought else, that they show decisively what manner of spirit they are of.

1. And first then Festus. What is the effect upon him of this argument?

He rudely interrupts the speaker, with raised voice and contemptuous sneer, saying (with even more of insolence than our English Version conveys), *Thou art mad, Paul: much*

learning doth make thee mad. To the rough ignorant Roman the narrative just ended is a mere jargon of unmeaning sounds. Jesus and the Resurrection; a turning of mankind *from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God;* a heavenly vision changing a life, and a zeal for souls shown in perpetual journeyings, toils, and sufferings; all these things are to him the mere ravings of a fanatic, unworthy of the notice of a sensible man, and only to be explained on the supposition of long secluded dreamings over philosophical books or mystical speculations. *Much learning doth make thee mad.*

What a charge to bring against a man whose labours were beyond those of any man! One who traversed sea and land, visited city and country, wrought with his own hands at a common trade, and turned every doctrine into an exhortation to practice! St Paul *maddened by much learning?* Festus might have found some more plausible, more possible, charge than that!

But so it is still. No charge is too foolish against a devout Christian. His life may be diligent, may be active beyond that of other men: he may go in and out day by day, with

a blamelessness not to be gainsaid, and a laboriousness not to be overlooked: yet, just because he is a man of faith, because he believes in a world above, and endures as seeing One who is invisible, he must be an enthusiast, a visionary, a fanatic: if not *much learning*, then perhaps much praying, *doth make* him *mad.*

Strange to say, these Festuses are sometimes found in our congregations. They will kneel and pray to an invisible God through an unseen Saviour. They will utter the words which give thanks for Redemption and invoke the Divine Spirit. And yet tomorrow in their business, tonight in their houses, they will not so much as argue—they will even take it for granted—that nothing is real but that which is seen, that all is visionary which is not material. They have no more real apprehension of the necessity, or of the possibility, of holding converse with God, of receiving strength from Christ, of being renewed and inhabited by the Holy Spirit, than if these things were the dreams of enthusiasts or the ravings of madmen. And strange to say, the modern Festus, like his original, will affect to talk of these first principles of the Gospel, as though they were the inventions of *learning;* as though

they were derived from the speculations of indolent students, and utterly unworthy of the notice of the vigorous sound-minded man of the world. Men calling themselves Christians, indignant if that title be denied them, will look you in the face and say, *Nothing is real but morality, and nothing is important but the conduct.* And if you seek as far as possible to agree with them, and only beg to extend the term conduct into the inner life; to interpret it as including a heart right with God, affections set on things above, gratitude to Christ, and trust in the Spirit; still you find, to your sorrow, that they meant what they said literally: to have done no harm to any one (as they count harm), to have been just to all (as they define justice), alas! sometimes—it is no imaginary picture—to have paid their way and kept themselves respectable, this is the sum and substance of their religion: anything higher, anything deeper, they simply put aside and think scorn of: and if you ask them what will remain after death of these boasted payments of earthly dues; what the soul will carry away with it of this earthly respectability; how they will occupy eternity, or what indeed they can do in heaven; you find them prepared to risk all that: they

will take their chance: God will not condemn the decent liver: perhaps even the indecent liver may not find himself quite shut out! Men who so talk are the Festuses of Christendom: and men who so judge, so presume, and so hazard, are (it must be feared) one ten times more numerous than they who avow and utter it.

We should ill copy St Paul's bright example, as it lies here before us, if we treated scornfully this state of feeling. How dignified, how majestic, because how calm and how courteous, his brief reply! *I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.* Yes, *the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men; in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.* He who so wrote, so did. He makes no compromise indeed with error. He does not hasten to explain away his convictions, or beg Festus to believe that he is one with him all the time in principle. Firmly, yet with all respect for office, does he repudiate the charge of madness, and declare that his words are words of truth, his faith as sober as it is profound.

The world of all time, of Christian times not least, delights to arrogate to itself the two titles, *sensible* and *practical.* On a spiritual life, on a heavenly mind, on an earnest zealous devotion, it sits in judgment half kindly, half scornfully. *It understands it all: it has taken the measure of all: it could be the same any day: but it is too sensible and too practical to think of it.* A calm, moderate, rational religion; in other words, a religion which can combine the conveniences of this life with the hopes of another; that is the aim—we could almost say, more and more the aim—of many of the most respectable and the most amiable of our countrymen. They take out of the Gospel all that makes it pungent, angular, or unamalgamable; and then they praise it for its adaptation to human life; compliment it upon its versatility; and quote perhaps, with a volubility almost profane, that verse of St Paul which says that *godliness hath the promise of the life that now is* as well as *of that which is to come.* It is not in that sense that St Paul wrote it: it is not in that sense that he here declares before Festus that the words of his Gospel are words of *truth and soberness.*

Rather does he say this: and may God write it upon all our hearts!

It is no madness to believe what God has spoken, to trust what God has revealed, or to expect what God has promised. To love Him with all my heart is no enthusiasm; to devote myself entirely to Christ is no fanaticism. Soberness is the spirit of a sound mind: that mind only is sound, which moves altogether where it moves at all, and carries out into daily action principles received as true. He is the madman, who *calls Christ Lord, Lord, and does not the things which He says;* who professes to be seeking a heavenly home, and never sets forth one foot towards it. *If the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him.*

We fools, shall Festus say of Paul in the day of the great re-awakening, *We fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour; how is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints!*

2. Turn to the other chief auditor: to king Agrippa. From the rude and hopeless Festus St Paul appeals to the more cultivated and enlightened assessor. *The king knoweth of these*

things. He must have heard surely, living in Palestine, and in constant communication with its people, the great story of the life and ministry, the death and resurrection, of Jesus of Nazareth; if not (for to this also the words may refer) of the wonderful conversion and devoted labours of his late-found disciple and Apostle. *Before him I speak freely. I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him. This thing*—whether the Saviour's work, or His servant's conversion—*this thing was not done in a corner.* But was there not, in Agrippa's case, a preparation for these great events? Did he not read, in Scriptures which he accepts, predictions, neither few nor doubtful, that thus it must be? *King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.*

It is difficult to imagine a more touching or persuasive appeal. We feel as though it must have told. And this feeling may have led to the adoption of that rendering of the king's answer, which yet, we fear, a sounder criticism must modify or set aside. *Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.* We read the words as grave and serious; the reply of a man moved deeply by the Apostle's question, and balancing seriously

the claim of duty which it presented. *Almost thou persuadest me: shall I yield, or shall I procrastinate?* And we draw from the words an instructive commentary upon the text, *Behold, now*—not tomorrow, but today—*behold, now is the accepted time: behold, now is the day of salvation.*

The lesson is seasonable, whensoever or whencesoever derived: but the scope of the king's answer is not this. That cold scoffing spirit was not thus suddenly solemnized: that profligate half-hearted time-server was not thus turned on the instant into a serious enquirer into truth. No, Agrippa says this rather—and in a tone either of playful banter, or of scornful sarcasm—*In a short space thou advisest me to become a Christian. A Christian—name abhorred alike of Jew and Gentile—name of reproach and obloquy wherever named—to become a Christian—to forfeit perhaps fortune and rank and royal title, and become the disciple of a despised Nazarene—the brother and the fellow of an outcast like thee—*

That's somewhat sudden—

thy words must needs be persuasive if they counsel that! To part with all, as the result of

a few moments' hearing; as the consequence of listening, in chance carelessness, in a casual visit, to a poor prisoner's self-defence; that surely thou canst scarcely ask for? Wait a while: give time and place, interval and opportunity, at least: propose not an act so momentous, on a summons so slight and short! Such sudden changes may do for thee; an inferior, a common Jew, an enthusiastic, impulsive, hasty man; converted by a sunbeam, by a voice, by a vision: they are not for me!

It is impossible to say, all proof being denied us, what may have been the innermost feeling of the mind which thus expressed itself. Some have supposed that the cold ironical answer was but the cloke of a spirit ill at ease; that the unexpected question of the Apostle had wrought a conviction within, which could neither safely be expressed nor altogether disavowed. It may have been so. But we who know anything of that case-hardening which is the punishment below of convictions long stifled, and more especially of fleshly lusts long cherished, must fear that the simpler aspect of the words is the truer, and that a conscience long skilled in parrying the

home-thrusts of conscience, is here seen turning aside the very *sword of the Spirit* by that triple coat of mail which is the last vesture of the obdurate.

At all events, we do best to draw our lesson rather from what is seen than from what may be hidden. And therefore we say this of Agrippa's answer; that it is the plea of more enlightened, as the other was of more ignorant minds, for putting aside the Gospel call. Festus called spirituality madness: Agrippa calls decision rashness. The one says, *To talk of things unseen; of matters which thou canst neither touch nor taste nor see nor smell; is, at once, enthusiasm and folly.* The other says, *To bid me alter all in a moment; to bid me give up rooted opinions, life-long principles, and imperious habits, at the call of a despised man's history; to persuade me, by a few brief words, and in a few fleeting moments, to forsake all and follow thee; this is unreasonable, this is trifling, this is ridiculous. At least I must have time.*

O, my friends, if there are Festuses among us, are there not Agrippas? Is not this the very answer, almost in words, of ten thousand times ten thousand? *It is too sudden—too*

abrupt—too startling? What will this friend think, and that enemy? What will become of this inveterate habit, and of that delightful, darling lust? O no! A little while hence—when I have just paved the way—when I have had a little conversation with wife or husband, when I have got out of my path this temporary obstacle and that formidable foe—then—then—but not now! How nearly is the lesson, when we study it attentively, that of the Gospel narrative! Jesus *said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead!* Yes, the Agrippa says the call is too sudden: he must do one or two little things first, and then—: but Jesus says, *If the word is true, if the call is from God, it admits of no delay: rather let the dying die without thy presence, and the dead go forth to his burial without thy following, than lose the opportunity—the one day, or the one hour, of thy visitation—by pleading that the world is urgent with thee, and that therefore God must wait!*

O, we know well, we know too well, the inconvenience of being hurried in the things of God! It is very inconvenient—it is intoler-

ably burdensome—to be told to go at once, to go today, to go this moment, and serve Christ. *If it might only wait one day! Why dost Thou come, Lord, before the time? I would have opened to Thee tomorrow: but there Thou standest knocking, knocking, knocking—and wilt take no denial! In too brief a time, on too sudden a summons, Thou wouldest have me to be a Christian!*

What says His servant? What saith he who could only advise, who could not give, decision? *I would to God*—yes, the original says, *I would pray to God—that, whether in a short space or a long, not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, might become such as I am, except these bonds.* The beautiful delicacy, and the touching courtesy, of this reply, has been the subject of admiring comment in all times. *Except these bonds. I would not have you like me in my privations, or like me in my sufferings: but I would have you like me in my faith, like me in my hope, and like me in my joy!*

Whether in a short space or a long. Agrippa says ironically, *In a short space,* with unreasonable suddenness, *thou wouldest make me into a Christian.* St Paul takes the word from him,

and answers, *What I seek is the result. Be it soon or late: be it on the sudden, or on long reflection: be it by my brief words, or by any other process, longer or shorter, which God may see fit in His wisdom and in His mercy to employ; I would see thee a Christian at last! I would see thee walking in the light. into which I have been admitted; enfranchised with that liberty wherewith Christ has set me free! I would have it so: and I will pray for it!*

King Agrippa, like Felix and Festus, like his ancestors in the sacred story, flits now from the scene. Nothing came, we believe, of this strange interview between light and darkness, between sin and the Gospel. Agrippa kept his useless idle faith in Jewish Scriptures, kept too his heart's lust, his obscene idol, his earth-bounded life. Times of trial drew on: in the last Jewish wars he sided with the Roman; and then retired to drag out an inglorious age through thirty uneventful years, with a titular royalty and in real servitude, under the imperial shadow at Rome. In the year of our Lord 100, being the third year of the Emperor Trajan, he died there; the last prince of the bloodstained race of Herod. Yet, like all whose

names, for good or for evil, are once stamped upon the holy page, Agrippa remains to all time for the edification and instruction of the Church which he despised.

Shall it be said of any of us, that we, without the excuse of Festus, are scoffers at the spiritual life? or that we, without the excuse of Agrippa, are dalliers with the trumpet-call of a Christian decision? O God forbid! I would summon you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, so to improve (more especially) that holy season on which we have this week entered, that it may be to you a time of serious self-examination, earnest heart-deep resolution, and true spiritual refreshing and revival! We need these mementos of judgment and eternity, every one of us: I have sometimes feared, we need them more than ever. Is there not amongst us an almost growing indifference, an almost growing intermixture and confusion between the Church and the world? if not a tardier step towards the sanctuary, at least a more wistful backward look towards the city of sin and of desolation? Judge ye, my friends, judge ye! and may the gracious parable be fulfilled yet again in every one of us, *While he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand...the*

Lord being merciful unto him...and said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed!

LECTURE XIX.

THE SHIPWRECK.

ACTS XXVII. 25.

Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.

THRICE I suffered shipwreck: a night and a day I have been in the deep. Thus St Paul wrote to the Corinthians more than two years before the events related in this chapter of his life. Of those earlier shipwrecks we have no record. They occurred, doubtless, in some one of those many gaps in the history of the Acts, of which his long residences at Tarsus in the 9th chapter, at Antioch in the 11th, 12th, and 14th chapters, at Corinth in the 18th, and at Ephesus in the 19th, will furnish a few examples.

But tonight, in our progress towards the close of our long course, we are to study the detailed account of a fourth shipwreck; that which befell him on his way from Palestine to Italy, whither he was sent as a prisoner exercising his right of appeal, as a Roman citizen, to the personal hearing of the Emperor.

St Paul's long detention at Cæsarea is now ended. His hearing before Festus and Agrippa had resulted in a full recognition of his innocence. It should almost seem as if his appeal to the Emperor had been a mistake, so far as his personal prospects were concerned. Agrippa had said to Festus, at the close of the last chapter, *This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar.* But *all things work together for good to them that love God:* and it was thus that the way was opened for that important ministry at Rome, to which he had so long and so earnestly looked forward.

The time was come. One of those merchant vessels, on which in those days even generals and princes had to depend for transit from one part to another of the great Empire, was now in the harbour of Cæsarea, bound for Adramyttium on the coast of Mysia. It was expected, no doubt, as it happened, that an opportunity

would be found of exchanging this vessel, in some port of Asia, for one more directly bound for Italy. Paul, and some other prisoners with him—each with his own burden of care and fear, he *an ambassador in bonds* for Christ—were placed under the charge of a centurion named Julius, and began the tedious navigation of the seas of Syria, Cilicia, and the further shores of Asia Minor.

One day brought them to Sidon. There, as elsewhere, was already a Christian community: and the courtesy of the centurion, interested (it should seem) thus early in his prisoner, allowed Paul the opportunity of visiting the place and the Church. What these glimpses of Christian friends were to him, we might guess from his character, and we know from his letters.

Contrary winds began thus early to retard the progress of his voyage. It was necessary to change the usual direction, sailing under the lee of Cyprus—that is, in this case, along the East and North (instead of the Southern side) of the island—and coasting along the shores of Cilicia and Pamphylia, until they reached the port of Myra in Lycia. There they lighted upon an Alexandrian cornship—driven perhaps by the same stress of weather out of its straighter

course to Italy—and the prisoners, with their centurion and other passengers, were transferred into it to prosecute their voyage thither.

It was, still and increasingly, a tedious passage. The wind, west or north-west, compelled them, after leaving Cnidus, at the south-west corner of the coast of Asia, to take the unusual and less desirable side of the great island of Crete, passing under Salmone its eastern headland, and then along its southern shore as far as an anchorage called (and still called) *Fair Havens,* in the neighbourhood of which, St Luke stays to notice, was a town named Lasæa.

For the moment they were in safety. There had been great loss of time; and now that season had set in, which sailors knew to involve, in those seas, especial danger. *The fast was now already past:* the fast, that is, of the great day of Atonement or Expiation, occurring (like our Michaelmas) at the end of September, and used, like it, as a common date of time. To advance further, so late in the season, and in the face of obstinately adverse winds, was an act of imprudence against which St Paul ventured earnestly to remonstrate. He foresaw, he said, that their onward way would involve great risk, not only to the cargo and the vessel,

but also to the numerous persons—soldiers, sailors, and passengers—on board. Two hundred and seventy-six souls formed an aggregate of human life not lightly to be thrown away. The warning was unheeded. Not yet had the full value of that inspired counsellor been felt and owned among them. The master (or pilot) of the ship, and the owner of the cargo, were listened to before the prisoner. *The harbour was not commodious to winter in;* and there was a better, could they but reach it, within forty miles, sheltered from those particular winds which were at present most to be dreaded.

The decision to proceed was taken, and for the moment all seemed to favour it. Instead of the troublesome westerly and north-westerly winds from which they had suffered, there blew from the south a gentle breeze, which enabled them, after rounding the cape, four or five miles to the westward of *Fair Havens*, to start with every advantage, along a shore bending now to the northward, for the desired haven of Phœnix. Triumphant, no doubt, over the cowardly prudence of the Apostle, they advanced a few miles, in good hope and high spirits, along the sheltering shore of Crete.

But a sudden change came. A tempestu-

ous wind, called Euroclydon, blowing from the north-east, came down upon the ship from the high lands of the island. There was nothing now to be done, but to submit. *The ship was caught, and we let her drive.* It was not without difficulty that they even could take up the boat which was in tow astern, and which might become so necessary for the safety of the crew. They then passed cordage tightly round the timbers of the ship, to prevent the risk of their starting asunder under the violence of the sea. Other precautions were taken, described in our Version as *striking sail,* to avoid their being carried, as the direction of the wind threatened, upon the famous quicksands, or Syrtis, of Africa. All must be done to keep well to the westward. The next day they lightened the ship of a portion of its cargo; the day following, of all its spare tackling.

And now it is impossible to imagine a more dreary or dispiriting scene than that which the sacred writer, St Luke, himself an eye-witness of all, so graphically presents. *No one,* writes a recent author (Dr. Howson) already repeatedly referred to, *who has never been in a leaking ship in a long-continued gale, can know what is suffered under such circumstances.*

The strain both of mind and body—the incessant demand for the labour of all the crew—the terror of the passengers—the hopeless working at the pumps—the labouring of the ship's frame and cordage—the driving of the storm—the benumbing effect of the cold and wet—make up a scene of no ordinary confusion, anxiety, and fatigue. But in the present case these evils were much aggravated by the continued overclouding of the sky, which prevented the navigators from taking the necessary observations of the heavenly bodies. When neither sun nor stars, St Luke says, *in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.*

To the gloom and despair everywhere prevailing was added the exhaustion of long abstinence. Ceaseless toil and utter despondency had precluded the thought of food. There was among them but one person now capable of command. It was the Christian prisoner: unheeded till danger pressed; but now the one leading and sustaining and animating spirit. He reminds them, yet without reproaches, of their disregard of his warning. The remembrance might make them listen now: too late to avoid, but not too late to mitigate, the evil.

And then he gives the solemn assurance, in the name of his God, that there shall be no loss of life. *There stood by me this night the Angel of that God whose I am and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul, thou must be brought before Cæsar: and lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.*

For the time there was no relief, no respite. The fourteenth night of that tossing upon the Adriatic was now come, when some sounds, indicative of approaching land, struck upon the practised ear of the sailors. The first notice was soon confirmed. The sounding line, which reported first a depth of twenty fathoms, soon changed to fifteen fathoms: and now an imminent danger arose of being wrecked upon the outlying rocks of some unknown shore. Nothing could be done, save to throw a number of anchors from the stern of the vessel, and then idly to *wish for the day.* O how many a weary watcher, through a long night of sickness of body or anguish of soul, has had to do that, and could do nothing more: just to *wish for the day!*

Before dawn, a new peril had shown itself. The selfish sailors, thinking only of their own lives, had formed the project of escaping in the boat, and leaving the soldiers and passengers to their fate. They pretended to be letting down the boat for another purpose; to carry out in it some anchors to steady the prow or foreship, as had already been done for the stern. It was again the Christian Apostle, whose ready discernment and calm promptitude averted the danger. *Paul said to the centurion and soldiers, Except these,* the sailors, *abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.* As if he had said, *There is work present, and work before us, which will need a mariner's skill as well as a soldier's courage.* The hint was enough. The soldiers used their swords, and the ropes of the boat were cut before the sailors could enter it. One boat could have availed little in present emergencies: and the help of the sailors was indispensable.

Yet once more, before the last crisis of the shipwreck, is St Paul's voice heard: and it is in the same calm and constant tone which has made him the commander, not in name but in right, of all who sail with him. He foresees that the last struggle of all will be trying and

formidable, and that exhausted frames can ill meet it. Instead therefore of exciting still further, by spiritual demands, minds already strung and taxed to the uttermost, he uses an argument altogether calming and fortifying, and prays them to take some food, necessary to health and even to safety; in the assurance that, however imminent the peril, life is secure. Secure, on God's word, and by special grant to God's servant. By precept first, and then by example, he summons them to this humble duty. *When he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some food.*

After this, in the prospect of a speedy end, for good or evil, of their present suffering, they threw overboard the remaining (and probably damaged) wheat, that the vessel might be lightened for its last grounding. Morning dawned upon an unknown shore. But it was their one chance: and presently they could discern, through the early twilight, an opening in the cliffs, disclosing a sandy or pebbly beach upon which it might be possible to run the vessel aground. They took up the anchors,

loosed the rudders from their fastenings, hoisted the main or (more probably) the foresail to the wind, and made toward the shore. The spot on which they lighted, proved to be a promontory, or in reality (it is supposed) an island scarcely separated from the coast, and forming a spot, St Luke says, *where two seas met;* upon which the vessel was so driven, that, while *the forepart stuck fast, and remained immovable, the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.*

At this last moment a formidable danger threatened the life of St Paul. It was the cruel counsel of the soldiers, hardened by long use to an utter unconcern for human life, to kill the prisoners; lest, in the confusion of this general struggle for self-preservation, any of them should escape from custody by swimming. And the suggestion was only frustrated by the care of the centurion Julius for that one Christian prisoner who from the first appears to have awakened his interest, and who by his conduct during these trying scenes must have gained a firm hold upon his confidence and esteem. As it was, a more humane order prevailed. *The centurion commanded that they who could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get*

to land: and the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship: And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

The details of the sacred narrative, and the curious and interesting questions which spring from it, are for another time and place. But it was impossible, without this brief survey of it, to bring into view that one thing with which we are all deeply concerned; the example here afforded of the exercise and the influence of a Christian mind in circumstances of trial, agitation, and pressing danger.

We have seen St Paul in many positions. We have noticed, at various times, in the course of these Lectures, his activity, his boldness, his wisdom, his faith, his charity, his devotion, his skill, his patience. But the point before us tonight is different from all these: might I not say as truly, is a combination of them all? his conduct and character as tested and probed by a long-continued season of imminent peril.

Danger is always a test of character. One man is daunted by danger. Another man is bewildered by danger. Another man is irritated by danger. Many a man is rendered selfish by danger. Read the history of a sudden

alarm of fire in a crowded building: the impulse of self-preservation is so strong as to defeat itself; and a heap of crushed or burnt corpses will attest both the predominance and the infatuation of a spirit of selfishness in the heart of man in a time of great and sudden jeopardy.

And this even in Gospel days. The diffusion of Gospel light does not of itself destroy this selfish principle in man. There are indeed three influences of unequal strength, but each powerful, which may under given circumstances counteract it.

(1) A sense of honour. The captain of a burning or sinking ship will count it his duty to be the last to quit her. He will maintain his place to the end, and perish (if need be) himself alone. A regiment of soldiers will keep guard on deck, over order and life; and count death itself but the just forfeit of a profession which is the soul of honour.

(2) And humanity alone has sufficed to make martyrs. A man worthy of the name will fling himself into deep water, in cold winter, to rescue a drowning woman.

(3) How much more will love—personal love—the love of husband or wife, of sister

or child—counteract the force of selfishness, and make timidity for the moment brave! These things are the instincts of original or of second nature. I scarcely know that we can connect them closely—certainly not inseparably—with the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour.

But how different are these things, at their highest point, from the sustained calmness and commanding wisdom of him whose long trial is here drawn out before us! None but a Christian—nothing but the Gospel—nothing but the living grace of a living Saviour—could have thus done and thus spoken!

Notice (1) the tranquillity. This man belongs to God. *God,* he says, *whose I am, and whom I serve.* Nothing can come amiss to him. He is the property of One, to whom to belong is to be immortal. To live on, is to see *the fruit of his labour.* To die, is *to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.*

Notice (2) the elevation. This man is in communication with God. *This night the Angel of God stood by me.* A man like this is just the converse of Jonah. To have him in the ship is a safeguard. See how a child in a thunderstorm will feel himself safe with a pious

parent. Nay, more than children have known the comfort of having a righteous man under their roof in days of popular excitement or raging pestilence. A visit from God's Angel—the abiding presence of the Lord of Angels—is enough to make a mean man a giant, a weak woman a tower of strength.

Notice (3) the faith. This man *believes God, that it shall be even as it was told* him. In his case, indeed, that which was told him was a special prediction of safety. *Thou must be brought before Cæsar.* Thou art on thy way to the Emperor's tribunal; and *as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.* This necessity, pleasant or painful, is thy safe conduct. *Immortal till thy work be done,* thy work is not done! *And, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.* Yes, the one faithful shall thus far guarantee the faithless. Where he is who is on God's business, there are they safe, in body at least, who are on their own!

In these days we know not these things. The child of God is early *taken away from the evil to come:* the wicked *rage* on, *and are confident.* Yet is the same spirit of faith, even where the same form of faith is not. He who,

whether he live, lives to the Lord, or, *whether he die, dies* also *unto the Lord,* may well be trustful amidst surrounding dangers, and even against hope believing.

Notice (4) the judgment. This man, the despised Christian, is at once pilot, and ship-master, and centurion. He is the one to foresee danger. He counsels prudence. He advises delay where safety is; and he shows how a danger which might have been averted can yet be mitigated. It is he who finds out the secret treachery of the sailors; it is he who recruits failing strength, by timely food, for to-morrow's labours. Yes, there are times when men who have scoffed at the Christian as a visionary, come to recognize his value. It is something in this selfish world, to be convinced of a man's disinterestedness. It is something, in this fickle and unprincipled world, to know that a man is honest, and that he has an aim. And at least in that hour when the world is receding from our view, and we care for nothing which is not both of God and to God, then, if never before, in that time of failing spirit and fainting heart, we send for him, and we desire and we tolerate him, and him only, of whom we are assured that he will speak to us the words of

God, and guide us, as in God's sight, into the one haven where we would be.

Notice yet again, (5) the authority. Who is this man? He is a prisoner: a prisoner of a despised race, the Jewish: a prisoner of an untolerated, an outlawed sect, the Christian. What is he, that he should speak with authority? Yet no sooner does danger threaten, than he is the man of authority. Pilot, owner, centurion, all are silent in the face of these warring elements. One alone speaks, who is at peace with the God of Nature, who has in him the God of grace! It is he who speaks now, and says, *Do this or that.* It is he who speaks then, and says, *Ye ought to have done this: now repair the error, and do that!* And strange to say, they listen. There is now no high priest to say to them that stand by, *Smite him on the mouth.* Euroclydon and Boreas have stopped that. He stands forth now, before sailors and soldiers, face to face with Nature and with Nature's God. The friend of God is the man listened to, when *God's arrows go abroad.* The day of God's judgment is the day also (even in this life) of *the manifestation* and the recognition *of the sons of God.*

Notice lastly (6) the love. This man, if he were a natural man only, would have been simply depressed, merely isolated, misanthropical, and self-contained. What matters it to him, who eats, or eats not? What matters it whose lives are given him, and whose left and lost? Yet he makes common cause in everything with the heathen soldiers who guard, and with the heathen centurion who is to hand him over. He cares for their cheerfulness as well as for their safety. He prescribes for their health, and he counsels for their hopefulness. Surely *the love of Christ constrains* him! Surely he has drunk deeply of that spirit *which was* first *also in Christ Jesus!*

My friends, it may not be given to us, or it may not be laid upon us, to be *driven for fourteen nights up and down in Adria,* as prisoners, confessors, and martyrs, for the testimony of the truth. Yet none the less is it given us, or else laid upon us, to cultivate betimes that spirit which St Paul here manifested in extreme danger. No man knows how he may be tried, even now, even in these still days and in our common life. Now and then a contagious sickness comes, when selfishness clamours within, and all but the true Christian

look out for themselves. Let a few cases of deadly fever, or of some new and foreign disease, occur (as they have occurred) in this town; and you will see who among rich or poor has anything of St Paul's spirit and anything of St Paul's charity. Where is then that Christian man, or that Christian woman, who is both brave with St Paul's boldness, wise with St Paul's prudence, and tender with St Paul's love? It is only he who communicates with God by night, who can carry about with him God's comfort and God's authority by day.

And there are dangers, Christian friends, more formidable, just because more subtle, than any that beset the body. There are temptations potent with souls; infections and contagions of evil more deadly than those of plague or pestilence. In these things also, he only is either wise to counsel or strong to command, who has tried in himself the arms which he would wield, and vanquished in himself the enemies against whom he would guard others. Be Christ's first yourself, and then shall you win others to Him. Like St Paul, first be God's, and then serve Him! *The sling and the stone* of an honest heart-deep sincerity shall be weapons more availing in the world-

wide and the life-long battle, than the showier *helmet and sword and coat of mail* which have been girt upon you by another unproved. Be yours first *the girdle of truth:* then *the shield of faith:* and then *the sword of the Spirit!*

LECTURE XX.

THE GOSPEL AT ROME.

ACTS XXVIII. 24.

And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.

THE persons thus spoken of were Jews, who had been listening at Rome to St Paul's argument from Scriptures that Jesus was Christ. The effect upon them was that which has been the effect of the like reasoning in all ages: *some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not.*

St Paul's shipwreck had occurred on the coast of Melita, or Malta. There he had been received with kindness; and two incidents of the visit had changed that kindness into reverence.

The first of these was a personal escape. Out of a faggot, gathered for burning, there came a viper, which fastened on his hand. At first the inhabitants took this as a proof that Paul was some malefactor—*a murderer*, they said—whom, though rescued from the sea, *vengeance suffered not to live.* But when they saw that he was able to shake off the reptile without any harm happening to him, *they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.* So slight and inconclusive are human reasonings, when they endeavour to draw inferences from life's accidents. It is not always that *the tower in Siloam falls* upon the eighteen guiltiest of the inhabitants of Jerusalem: nor is the prosperity of men always a proof of their virtue. The time of retribution, for good or for evil, is not yet. To interchange Providence and judgment is one of the gravest mistakes that man can fall into.

The other incident was of a different kind. The father of *the chief man of the island,* in whose house Paul stayed for three days, was ill of a dangerous sickness: and it was granted to the Apostle, through prayer and the laying on of his hands, to be the instrument of his miraculous restoration. This led to other applica-

tions. *When this was done, others also, who had diseases in the island, came, and were healed.* Thus the Christian prisoner—for such he still was—became the object of general honour, and many marks of grateful veneration attended his departure.

Three months had thus passed, when another Alexandrian cornship, which had wintered in a port of the island, and was now about to complete its voyage to Italy, gave the opportunity of ending this tedious detention. By Syracuse, and Rhegium, they at length reached Puteoli in the Bay of Naples, and remained there for seven days in the society of Christian friends. From thence it was a land journey. Along a road, almost every step of which is familiar to the classical student, they went towards Rome. At two places on the road they were greeted by visitors from the capital; assuring them that, whatever danger or suffering might be in prospect, Christ *had much people in the* great *city;* and that there would at least be sympathy, if there was not protection.

Arrived in Rome, the centurion, Julius, delivered up his prisoner to Burrus, prefect of the prætorian guard. Here too the same interest which St Paul everywhere awakened was shown

in every possible mitigation of his position. He was allowed to hire a lodging, apart from the camp, and to occupy it unmolested, save by the perpetual presence of a soldier to whom he was chained. Henceforth for two years was realized to the letter that title in which he learned to glory, *An ambassador in bonds;* more exactly, *an ambassador in a chain.* They who sought him out now must *not be ashamed of his chain.* Whether he ate or slept, conversed or preached, wrote or prayed, a rude Roman soldier, the native perhaps of some remote semi-barbarous province, must be the companion of every act, the sharer of every confidence, the witness of every utterance whether in the ear of man or God.

Thus was he learning his highest lessons in the school of God. He was *enduring hardness,* not in the form of great enterprises, but rather in that of a compulsory inactivity, *as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*

Yet even here he is the witness, not in word but by example, to that marvellous truth, that there is no condition of life, absolutely none, in which he who wishes to find work for God is debarred from doing so. Many a man who has preached half in vain from his pulpit has

preached with authority and with acceptance from his sick bed. Those who had scoffed at the call to hear him preach have been melted at the summons to see him suffer.

Three days only had passed since his arrival in the great city, when he finds means—true to his system and to his Master's orders—to speak his Gospel first of all to the Jew. By the help of St Luke, of Timotheus, of Demas, or some other of his companions not in bonds, and still more perhaps of some of the Christian residents in Rome, he found means to *call together the chief of the Jews*, and to protest to them both his innocence of any criminal or even unpatriotic conduct, and also his devout adherence to that *hope of Israel*, the great doctrine of a Messiah and a Resurrection, for which he always declared himself to be thus outcast and suffering. *Because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.* The answer was more civil perhaps than ingenuous. His auditors declared that they had heard nothing against him by word or letter from their countrymen in Judea. They only desired to hear from his own lips what he had to say *concerning this* new *sect* which *is everywhere spoken against.* They spoke as

persons open to conviction; waiting only to be convinced.

A day was fixed for a full discussion of this momentous question, the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth. From every part of the Old Testament St Paul drew his arguments; *opening and alleging* no doubt (as at Thessalonica) *that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. From morning till evening* the disputation lasted. Even enemies to the truth were then in earnest, and counted not the minutes, no, nor the hours, of a discourse on the things which professed to be for their peace.

The result is expressed in the words of our text. After which there remains only, at the close of the Book, that solemn *one word* with which St Paul at last unwillingly dismissed the gainsayers; even that passage from the vision of Isaiah, which is more often quoted in the New Testament than any other clause of ancient Scripture; the voice of Divine judgment upon the indolent and dishonest hearer, whose punishment shall be the inability to hear aright; the sealing upon him, finally and for ever, of that deafness, that blindness, that obduracy,

which he has chosen. From such a judgment —for it is of all time—may God in His mercy keep us!

God's word will always have its hearers. *If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.* Children of Abraham there will ever be, if even the stones must furnish them. *Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.*

And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.

And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him; preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

No words, alas! could be more suitable to a modern Christian congregation, none certainly more appropriate to the close of more than a year and a half's course of Sermons, than those which describe the mixed results of Divine instruction even when an Apostle—nay, even when Christ Himself—was the preacher. There is a truthfulness as well as a pathos in the

sound, a correspondence with experience as well as a presage of consequences, to which we shall do well to give betimes a serious and an earnest heed.

Some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.

1. So then the Gospel itself prepares us for its own disappointment. If men say to us, *How is it that a Revelation, supposed to be true, does not command an universal assent? how can God speak, and yet not convince? how can men refuse to Divine statements a credence which no sane person withholds from facts adequately proved by human testimony?* and then proceed to argue that therefore the Christian Revelation is not adequately proved; we answer, that, at all events, the record itself led us to expect the result which is complained of; warned us that its acceptance would not be universal; and bade us seek the explanation of this phenomenon elsewhere than in the deficiency or inconclusiveness of its proof. It is at least a remarkable thing, that a religion which speaks so authoritatively, which claims so confidently for itself a heavenly and a Divine origin, should yet declare itself to be come into the world, not for triumph, but for division; should

inscribe on its pages the admission that of the earliest witnesses of the Resurrection *some doubted;* should give directions for the treatment of refusers as well as of accepters of the message; should state this as the effect of a long and detailed argument in its behalf on the part of its most earnest and persuasive advocate, that *some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.* We say of such a religion, that at least it has taken the sting, by anticipation, out of the argument from failure, and uttered a true prediction as to the degree and measure of its own success. Here, as elsewhere, we recognize that transparent truthfulness about itself, which is one of the distinctive badges of the pure original Gospel.

2. On the other hand, it cannot be said that Christianity regards with indifference this various, this chequered result. It is the wish of some persons—the wish sometimes of idle unconcern, sometimes of human charity—to represent the Gospel simply as an offer; the presentation of something higher and better than nature dreamed of; the disclosure of *a more excellent way* for such as can walk in it; for the chance, as it were, of its finding, here and there, a tribe or an individual, whose sense of

want or whose instinct of good it may either satisfy or stimulate. They will speak, or they will act, as though it were a good thing to be a Christian if you can, but not a fatal loss to be incapable of that attainment. To take pains to evangelize a new continent, or to press the Gospel upon a careless friend; to express a fear for the unbelieving, or to doubt the eternal repose of a soul gone to its account faithless; these things are looked upon as the baseless anxieties of superstition, or the uncharitable suspicions of self-righteousness. The Gospel is the luxury of the few, not the necessity of all.

It ought to be enough, in a Christian audience, to recall men to the plain words of Scripture; to say, The Gospel does not thus offer itself as for the equal alternative of acceptance or rejection; does not stand amongst men *under the form of an inviting suppliant, having nothing but smiles and caresses wherewith to win the devotion of an admiring but thoughtless multitude;* does not pretend to be without terrors for the rejecter, or ignorant of the doom of him who shall have *received this grace of God in vain.* The Gospel, if it speaks truthfully—much more, if it speaks truly—does predict wrath as well as promise mercy: it misleads, ignorantly or else

intentionally, if there be not as really an *everlasting punishment* as a *life eternal.* The Gospel is not indifferent, though it be distinctly prescient, as to this *believing and believing not.*

3. When we strive to look below the surface, and to discover why one believes and another believes not; why that proof which is equal for all should convince one and fail with another; why it is that God's rain and God's sunshine fertilize this spot and leave that barren; why reason and conscience, mind and soul, equal (in two instances) in vigour and capacity; should view with different eyes the selfsame disclosure; we are in the midst, at once, of those indeed *secret things* which *belong* wholly *to the Lord our God.* And we must be willing, unless we would make shipwreck at once of faith and charity, to leave all judgment in His hands, who, being the Lord of all, will assuredly do right. But in the midst of many speculations there is one thing practical. I would ask each member of this congregation, whether he does not find in himself a close connection between the state of his faith and the state of his life; whether he cannot, almost accurately, put together cause and effect, in such sense that,

when he is at peace with his conscience, he is also most favourably disposed towards the Gospel; in other words, when he is living as he knows he ought to live, then is he not least but most convinced of the truth of Revelation, of the reality of Christ.

There are indeed cases—saddest and most perplexing of all—in which a good life seems to have parted company altogether with that faith which first perhaps reformed it. Cases, in which men of blameless lives, of honest endeavours and searchings after truth, nay, even of earnest prayers for the Divine teaching, cannot lay hold—or (worse still) have lost their hold—upon the distinctive revelations of the Gospel. But, pardon me if I say it positively, this is not your case. These are cases which do not occur once in a generation in common life. They belong to the seclusion of learned study: perhaps that seclusion itself may more than half explain them. Perhaps, if these doubts had been early dragged into action; if they had been brought face to face with the stern realities of a poor man's cottage, still more of sorrow and bereavement, of sickness and impending death; even they might have been dissipated: the necessity of Christ

might have been felt more than His distance, and the theoretical doubter might have become a practical Christian.

I say it again, This rare case is not your case. You, if you answer the question truthfully, in the secret of your own bosom, will say this: *There is a connection, in me, between unbelief and sin. When I am neglecting duty, when I am cherishing an evil temper, when I am unfaithful to life's relations, when I am yielding to some besetting temptation, when my conscience is not clear, nor my mind submissive, nor my heart clean, then it is that I put from me the faith of Christ; then it is that I feel doubts about God's Word; then it is that I become loose in my ideas of truth, and slack in my hold upon the things unseen. In short, when I am not good, then it is that I believe not.* Could any words more strongly express the evidence which the Gospel brings with it to us? If there be this practical connection, for us, between faith and virtue, then, without looking at others—without saying how it may be with nations which have not heard or with minds which cannot embrace the Gospel—we may at least understand how, for ourselves, not to believe is to be in peril, and to die unbelieving

is to perish and to be condemned. The heart and the life have at least as much to do with faith as the understanding.

4. In the face of these unaccountable differences between man and man; some believing, and others (with advantages at least equal) believing not; we come, more and more as life advances, to rest, simply and trustingly, upon the declaration of Scripture, that faith itself is God's gift, the work of His Spirit, and commonly the direct answer to persevering prayer. We presume not, we believe it to be at present impossible, to state or to define to ourselves the logical coherence of the two fundamental doctrines of grace and responsibility. How, if God alone can give, man is condemned for not having; how, if some are chosen unto life, others are yet accountable for not finding it; how, if *God works in us to will and to do,* man must yet *work out his own salvation with fear and trembling.* But, whatever may be the logical difficulty, there is little or no difficulty of practice or of the heart. If God gives, man must ask: if God promises to give to him that asks, he who asks not cannot complain if he has not.

And thus, for all practical purposes, it is

enough to rest the case here. Are you asking? asking as of a real Person for a real gift? Do you deeply feel that you cannot give yourself faith? that faith, I mean, which is now in question? not a convinced understanding only, a mind familiar with Christian evidences, and contented to acquiesce in the received opinion of Christendom, but a heart resting upon Christ, and a life carefully conformed to His teaching? And feeling this, do you honestly and earnestly apply to God to give it you?

I do not believe in unanswered prayers. I do not believe in a man really and earnestly and humbly seeking God, and *seeking Him in vain.* I can understand his being kept waiting; waiting, that is, for a comfortable consciousness of being listened to; waiting for a bright light and for an assured hope. But I do not believe in a man dying an unbeliever, who has constantly and patiently prayed for faith. It would make me anxious about the truth of Christ, if I could believe it. But it wants proof. Yes, in spite of all assertions to the contrary, I believe that such a case yet waits for an example. *Every one that asketh,* our Lord says, *receiveth;* receives at last, if not instantly; receives, if he still prays on (as He Himself has taught us

to do) and faints not; receives enough at least for safety, if not enough for peace. On that rock I will build: and when I am taunted with the doctrine of sovereign grace, or of Divine election, as introducing an idea of injustice, or even of inequality, into God's dealing with His creatures, I shall still say that practically the difference is made by a man praying or not praying; that he who believes is a praying man, and that he who believes not prays not!

5. It must be plain to every one here present, that, even among professed Christians, there are still believing men and unbelieving. When the Scripture says, *Some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not,* it does not speak of that sort of believing which consists only in an assent of the understanding. *With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.* It is not every one here present who does that. We have listened, not without attention, to a course of fifty or sixty Sermons on this one Book of Scripture. And some have gone home, week by week, to review the passage commented on, to examine its details, to store up its instruction, and to take a livelier interest than before in this inspired history of the early fortunes of the Church of Christ.

But O, my friends, is this enough? Does this, of itself, say anything as to the faith of the heart? Does this, of itself—yea, if it be multiplied a thousand fold—give any promise as to hope in death, as to happiness in eternity? Still, even among these—these, our more attentive hearers—there may be some who believe the things spoken, and some who believe not! in other words, some who pray, and some who pray not; some, who cannot live without communion with God; some, whose daily struggle it is to *enter into the holiest,* where God is, *by the blood of Jesus;* and others, who are well contented to enjoy God's gifts, as in a far country, without one yearning after Him, without once saying in the deep of the heart, *I will arise and go to my Father!* Therefore, my brethren, it is still with us, as it was in the first days of the Gospel, an anxious, a fearful enquiry, Do we yet believe? If we do, we cannot sleep in indifference, we cannot rest in the world, we cannot live in sin. To believe is to see ourselves lost by nature, and redeemed by the blood of Christ. To believe is to *live no longer to ourselves, but to Him who died for us and rose again.* To believe is to *declare plainly,* by our whole spirit and conduct, that

we *are strangers and pilgrims on the earth, seeking a better country, that is, an heavenly.* To believe is to have our *affections set on things above;* our very *life hidden with Christ in God.*

O God, grant that we may not be among those self-deluders, who shall say to Christ in the judgment, *We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets;* but to whom He shall answer and say, *I never knew you!* May we all so live, as in Thy sight! so *know Thee now by faith,* that *after this life we may have the fruition of Thy glorious Godhead!*

THE END.

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